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Chapter 1

Dawnpaw woke to the sound of birds chirping and the sun shining through the cracks in the apprentice's den. She groggily got up and padded out of the den. When she padded out, she stopped and looked around before stretching with a yawn, her light orange tabby pelt with white patches shining brightly, with slight muscles rippling under her pelt. She then padded to the fresh kill pile and took a plump mouse for herself and padded to a shady tree and laid down and began to eat her meal.

When she was done, she licked the remnants of meat off her lips and began to lick her pelt clean. A few minutes later, her best friend, Tigerpaw, padded out of the den and took a rabbit and joined her. "Nice of you to get up, sleepyhead. Berrystream should've named you Sleepykit instead, so then you'll be Sleepypaw." She teased with a laugh once he laid down beside her. "Ha ha, very funny." He said with a smile as he took a bite of his rabbit. Berrystream was his mother, and she is a halfclan cat. Her parents were from different clans. Her mother was of ThunderClan descent, and leader, while her father was Riverclan. That's why her mother came up with the name of Berrystream for her kit. Berries in ThunderClan and streams in RiverClan.

They laughed together for awhile before Dawnpaw's mentor, Blackfoot, padded up to her. "Hey Dawnpaw, Tigerpaw. Care to make room?" He teased as he squeezed in between the two apprentices. "Ugh, Blackfoot! Move your huge mouse brained body!" Dawnpaw teased as she rolled over under his weight. He was a big cat with a fluffy pelt and the two apprentices were like kits compared to him. He just chuckled and got comfy. Blackfoot is a good friend of Dawnpaw's mother, Sparkpelt, and so Dawnpaw grew up with him and became good friends with him as well.

He then got up and sat down in front of them. Dawnpaw took an exaggerated breath of air as she got up. "Oh please." Blackfoot said

with a playful roll of his eyes. "Ready to train?" He asked and Dawnpaw nodded. "You'll have to wait for Mistyheart to show up." Blackfoot said with a laugh, referring to Tigerpaw's mentor. "What about me?" A she cat purred from behind Blackfoot. The light gray she cat padded up to Blackfoot and dragged her fluffy tail over his broad shoulders and Blackfoot sucked in a breath. Mistyheart snickered and sat down beside him. "Yes, you two can train together." She purred. The two apprentices smiled wide at each other and got to their paws excitedly.

They padded to the sandy hollow and the two mentors sat down in front of the apprentices. "Blackfoot and I have decided to see how well you two would do if you faced an opponent. So, you two will be fighting each other. You can start whenever you want." Mistyheart said and the two nodded at each other before facing each other. "You've trespassed onto ThunderClan territory, rogue. Leave now or face my wrath." Dawnpaw said with a mischievous smile. Tigerpaw sneered. "And what are you going to do about it, kit?" He spat and Dawnpaw growled and jumped on him, tackling him to the ground.

Tigerpaw bit her front leg and Dawnpaw bit back a yelp and held her ground. He raked his sheathed claws over her belly and she moved out of his aim and raked her sheathed claws over his face and while he was dazed, she jumped at him and bit his neck, signaling triumph and she got off of him and sat in front of the mentors proudly. Blackfoot smiled proudly and he sneered playfully at Mistyheart. She rolled her eyes and looked away, but smiled. They clearly liked each other but Dawnpaw didn't know what was keeping them from being mates.

"Very nice, Dawnpaw." Blackfoot said with a proud smile. "So, how about we show you a new technique?" He asked and Tigerpaw sat beside Dawnpaw and they smiled wide and nodded rapidly. They smiled at each other and proceeded to show the apprentices the trick.

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Dawnpaw scampered into camp as she looked back to talk to her companions while laughing. After a long day of training, she was

hungry and she padded to the fresh kill pile. It was getting low and Leafstar would order patrols in the morning. Dawnpaw saw Blackfoot tell Leafstar that they had scented badger near the camp. Leafstar then padded out of her den and leapt onto the Highstone. "All cats old enough to catch prey on their own, gather under the Highrock." She yowled and all the cats gathered beneath. "On the way from training, Blackfoot, Mistyheart, Dawnpaw, and Tigerpaw had scented badger near the camp. I want extra patrols around the territory at-" Leafstar said but a strong scent of badger reined over the camp and a yowl pierced the air as a badger lumbered it's way in the camp.

Dawnpaw's eyes widened with fear as the hoard of cats attacked it at once. Leafstar leapt from the Highrock and onto it's back, biting the back of it's neck hard. Dawnpaw sprang into action, abandoning her sparrow and forgetting about her hunger and tiredness and bit at the badger's back leg. A crash ripped through the air once more as another badger trampled through the camp. Most of the cats went for the second badger but Dawnpaw continued to fight with the first badger. She climbed onto it's back and raked her unsheathed claws over it's back as she bit hard onto the nape of it's neck, tasting blood in her mouth.

The badger yipped in pain as it tried to shake Dawnpaw off it's back but the young apprentrice didn't budge. The badger growled and stood on it's hind legs and proceeded to purposely fall down. Dawnpaw had no choice but to lose her grip on the badger and land on all fours. Her fur bristled and she hissed as she bared her teeth. The badger snarled and rose a large paw and knocked her into a tree.

The impact knocked the wind out of Dawnpaw and she struggled to get up. She opened her eyes slowly and everything was spinning. She then focused on a badger that was in front of her. It was clearly occupied and didn't notice her but she saw a black and white pelt in the jaws of the badger, and it was shaking it's head viciously. She recognized the cat as Blackfoot. Her eyes widened and she struggled to get to her paws. Once she did, she only made it three steps before collapsing in a heap of pain once more. She saw darkness dot her eyes as she struggled to get up.

Dawnpaw started hyperventilating as she rose to her paws. The limp body of Blackfoot hung in the jaws of the badger and it dropped him like a piece of crowfood before lumbering away. Dawnpaw's vision started to clear up and the only thing she was focusing on was her mentor's body, splayed and bloodied. She proceeded to try and crawl over to him but her body screamed in pain. That was the last thing she saw, his splayed body, before slipping into darkness...

Chapter 2

Dawnpaw woke to feel her body aching all over. She felt a stinging on her right side and looked to see that there was a poultice on her flank. She let her head fall back onto the moss bed and she closed her eyes. *I'm so tired*. She then remembered one important thing. "*Blackfoot*!" She yowled sadly as she got to her paws, now full of enregy. "Dawnaw, Dawnpaw. It's ok. Lay down. Go back to sleep." Feathermist, the medicine cat and Flamepaw's mentor, said as she rushed over to the hysterical apprentice. "No. I was so close. I could've helped him. I could've. I could've... but I couldn't. It's my fault!" Dawnpaw wailed as she collapsed once more.

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Dawnpaw woke to the sound of hushed voices. She didn't know what time it was. Didn't know how long she was out for. But she didn't care. Dawnpaw couldn't save her best friend and it was her fault. "She thinks it's her fault. There just happened to be badgers in the camp and he just happened to..." Dawnpaw heard Feathermist's soft and grief ridden voice speaking to another at. "I know." Another she cat's voice filled the air softly and Dawnpaw recognized it as her mother's, Willowheart. She heard one of the cats approach her and she closed her eyes but listened in. "Oh Dawnpaw. If I could take your guilt away, I would." Willowheart said as she gently put her nose to the back of her daughter's head. "How is Flamepaw doing?" Willowheart asked.

"I don't know. It's the first attack of Flamepaw being a medicine cat apprentice and losing so many cats, especially one that's a good friend, can be hard. She seemed distant and upset but I gave her some poppy seeds to help her sleep." Feathermist said. Dawnpaw didn't want to hear anymore so she went back to sleep.

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Dawnpaw woke to a prodding on her shoulder. She grumbled as she rolled over to see Tigerpaw standing over her with fresh kill in his

jaws. He put the prey down and smiled sadly. "Hey sleepyhead. How are you doing?" He said softly. "How do you think I'm doing?" She snapped with an eye roll. "Eat and come out. There's a burial ceremony going on." Tigerpaw said and flung a mouse to her and walked out of the medicine cat den. Dawnpaw sighed and ate, then got to her paws with a wince and padded out and sat beside Tigerpaw. Seeing Blackfoot's body laying there... it made her burst into tears once more.

Tigerpaw wrapped his tail around her in a comforting gesture and Dawnpaw buried her face in his chest. Leafstar padded out and sat beside Blackfoot's body. "We have lost a kind and well known cat yesterday. Blackfoot was forgiving and loving to all and every cat. He got along well with every cat at gatherings and we will miss his free spirited nature. May StarClan light your way, Blackfoot." The dappled leader said sadly as she rested her nose to his flank in a sign of respect.

Dawnpaw timidly walked up to his body and laid down and rested her head on the back of his neck. Mistyheart joined and laid down beside Dawnpaw and licked the back of his head. "We never got to be mates but I'm glad I get to bare his kits." The light gray and blue she cat said with a small, sad smile and looked down at her stomach, which Dawnpaw noticed was bulging with kits. Dawnpaw smiled and purred but then remembered he would never be there to see his kits. "Don't worry, he's watching us right now from StarClan." Mistyheart said with a sad smile. "He would be proud." Dawnpaw said with a small smile as she licked her best friend's pelt, one last time to share tongues with him.

Chapter 3

Two moons had passed since Blackfoot's death. She had managed to forget about the incident for one full day when Tigerpaw took her out of camp for the day. Now, they were returning from their day out and Dawnpaw laughed as she entered the camp. Willowpelt, her mother, was talking to Feathermist, the medicine cat, and they were laughing. Willowpelt noticed that Dawnpaw had returned and she padded to her daughter. "There's a gathering tonight. Leafstar should be announcing who will go soon." The black she cat with white paws, muzzle, and tailtip, said with a smile. "Cool. I wond-" Dawnpaw started but was cut off by Leafstar's yowl.

"There is a gathering tonight. I would like my deputy Whitestorm, Ravenwing, Birdsong, Tigerpaw, and Dawnpaw to join me tonight." Leafstar said and jumped off the Highrock and padded to the entrance of camp, waiting for the other cats to join. The two apprentices shared a happy smile and then began to pad over to Leafstar. It wasn't their first gathering. They had went once before with Blackfoot when Dawnpaw was 9 moons. She was now 12 moons. A pained yowl filled the air and it came from the nursery. "Mistyheart!" Dawnpaw exclaimed as she stopped in her tracks and bounded to Leafstar. "I can't go. I'm not missing the birth of Blakfoot's kits." Dawnpaw said quicly as she bounded to the nursery, not caring to hear if Leafstar has any complaints or if Tigerpaw was following or not. Her only concern was Mistyheart and the kits.

"Nightclaw, Jaysong, with me!" Dawnpaw heard Leafstar yowl before ducking into the warm, milk scented nursery. Feathermist and Flamepaw were already there, soothing the blue, fluffy she cat. She felt a presence behind her and realized it was Tigerpaw. Dawnpaw slowly padded in and sat on the far side of the nursery facing the busy cats but equally out of the way.

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After what felt like an eternity, the first kit came out. It was an identical copy of it's mother and they determined it was a female. "Now that she's out, the others will come quickly, with at least 10 minute intervals." Feathermist said as she had Mistyheart chew on herbs that Dawnpaw couldn't name, but it looked like borage leaves. From what Flamepaw had told her, it was for times like these. Ten minutes had gone by and soon the next kit had come out. It was a black and white male... just like Blackfoot.

Dawnpaw started hyperventilating and she bursted out of the nursery and sat outside the nursery in the chilly air as she took deep breathes. Tigerpaw soon joined her and licked her cheek in a comforting gesture. "He should be here. He should be here to see his kits be born. But he's not and it's all my fault." She said as she sobbed. Tigerpaw hushed and cooed, trying to calm her down. "Hey, hey. It's not your fault, ok?" He said softly as he licked her. She couldn't say anything, she could only cry and hyperventilate.

What felt like an hour but probably was only a few minutes, she had finally calmed down and was starting to fall asleep on Tigerpaw's shoulder. "I'll take you to the apprentice's den." He said and helped her up. "No. I want to be there for Mistyheart." She protested and padded back into the nursery. She padded in and Mistyheart was resting her head and Feathermist and Flamepaw were still there, watching over her. Dawnpaw noticed that there was another kit suckling, like her siblings. A blue and white one. She found it amazing that one looked like her mother, one like his father, and one like the both of them combined, into one amazing female.

Mistyheart picked up her head and smiled weakly at them. Dawnpaw gave a small smile and padded slowly over to her. She crouched down and smiled at the tiny kits. "What are their names?" She asked with a smile. "Well, the gray one is Rainkit, the black and white one is..." Mistyheart choked out. It hurt her to introduce her kits to everyone except their father. "It's ok." Dawnpaw said with a small smile as she reached over and placed her paw gently on Mistyheart's.

The blue she cat smiled sadly and continued on, more confident this time. "His name is Blackkit, in memory of his father." She said with a smile and as if he heard, Blackkit squealed. "And the one that looks like a combination of us is Jadekit. She opened her eyes for a split second and I saw bright green eyes that reminded me of jade." Mistyheart explained with a proud smile. Dawnpaw smiled and looked at them lovingly. "Maybe I can mentor one of them one day." Dawnpaw said with a smile as she looked Mistyheart. "Of course. I want you to mentor Blackkit." Mistyheart said with a smile and Dawnpaw started crying again. "Aww, don't cry dear. He's always here with us. I know that somewhere in StarClan, he's watching us right now and proud of his kits." Mistyheart whispered as they embraced.

Dawnpaw nodded and cleaned herself up. "Looks like you're all good here, Mistyheart. We'll let you sleep. Congratulations." Feathermist said and Flamepaw smiled and padded out behind her mentor. "We should go too." Dawnpaw said with a small smile and Mistyheart nodded. "I'm happy for you, Mistyheart." Tigerpaw said and the apprentices padded out and to the apprentices den. Dawnpaw padded to her moss bed but Tigerpaw stopped her. "Do you want to sleep with me tonight?" He asked and his voice wavered, as if he was nervous. Why would he be? They've shared a moss bed together before.

Dawnpaw nodded and padded over to him. She laid down beside him, facing him, and they got close to be comfortable. "You know I'm always here for you, right?" Tigerpaw asked softly. "Of course. And I'll know we'll be best friends forever." Dawnpaw said and cuddled up closer to the bramble tom. Dawnpaw felt Tigerpaw smile and she smiled as well, her heartrate suddenly inclining and feeling an awkward heat spread throughout her body. She ignored it and quickly fell asleep, faster than she ever did than when she was alone. She always seemed to wake up energized and refreshed in the morning; happiness, whenever she would sleep with Tigerpaw. As if her depression didn't exist as long as Tigerpaw was there with her at night to wash away the day's sadness.

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Dawnpaw woke in a grassy, starry field lined with a thin layer of

mist. A cat stood a few tail lengths ahead of her, sitting on a jumble of boulders. She approached timidly and realized it was Blackfoot. She bounded over and leapt at him. "Oof." He said as they landed over the boulder and onto the starry ground. "Blackfoot!" Dawnpaw yowled excitedly as her tail tip quivered with excitement and joy. "Hey. Long time, no see." He said with a smile. Dawnpaw smiled and leaned into his chest. "Too long." She said softly with a smile. It was as if he was really there, really with her.

"Most definitely. I've missed you." He said with a smile as Dawnpaw gave him some space. "Me too. Oh! I almost forgot, Mistyheart gave birth!" Dawnpaw exclaimed as she smiled wide. "I know. You should listen to her when she says that I'm always with you." He said with a wink and Dawnpaw smiled. "It's amazing how two of them are identical to their parents while the third is a mix of both of us." He said with a smile. "How come you never asked her to be mates with you?" Dawnpaw suddenly asked.

Blackfoot frowned and sat down. "It's complicated. Well, not really, but we didn't want to ruin our relationship if we had broken up." He explained sadly. "Oh please, you both loved each other, you wouldn't have broken up." Dawnpaw said. "I know but that fear still lingers. I suggested we don't become mates but I said we could have kits. And that's what happened." Blackfoot explained with a frown. "Let's change the subject. Anyway, Tigerpaw." Blackfoot said with a wink.

Dawnpaw felt heat rush through her pelt and she felt her nose and ears getting red, a surefire sign on blush. "W-what are you talking about?" She asked, trying to play koi but it wasn't working because Blackfoot gave her an "I'm not stupid" look. She smiled cheekily and sat down. "I see the way he looks at you. He never used to before. I never noticed before I died but now I do." He said with a smirk. Dawnpaw rolled her eyes playfully with a smile and scoffed. "No. Never. I will never believe that he likes me." She said with a smile. "Ok." He said and smirked. "So I see you're going to be a warrior in the next coming moons." Blackfoot said with a proud smile.

"Yeah." She said with a wide smile but then it disappeared. "What?" He asked. "Aren't you happy?" He added. "Of course, but you won't be there to see me become a warrior. You should. You *would've* if it

wasn't for me not being there for you." Dawnpaw said sadly as she hung her head. "Dawnpaw, listen to me." Blackfoot said sternly. "*It is not your fault.* It was the badger's, ok? You forget that thought right now. I don't blame you for my death." Blackfoot said as he nudged Dawnpaw comfortingly. She looked up at him and frowned but nodded anyway.

The ground shook and the scenery started to blur along the edges. "You're waking up." Blackfoot said. Dawnpaw's eyes widened but the black and white tom smiled and pressed his nose to his apprentice's forehead. "It's not your fault." He whispered with a smile and Dawnpaw smiled, savoring the touch and memory of him.

Dawnpaw felt a prodding on her shoulder. She blinked open her eyes and squinted through the sun peering in through the cracks in the roof of the den. She seemed dazed for a moment, hoping that Blackfoot's death was a dream and that he was still alive. She turned and saw Tigerpaw looming over her with a smile. "Morning." He said and dragged her out of bed. He walked out with Dawnpaw at his heels and he padded to the fresh kill pile.

"Um, are you ok?" She asked. He was acting exceptionally strange this morning. "Yeah. I just woke up feeling amazing, is that so bad?" He asked with a smile. "No." She said and he smiled wider. "Good." He said with a smile and padded giddily to the fresh kill pile. "What's with him?" Willowpelt asked and Dawnpaw shrugged. "Maybe we should have Flamepaw check him out." Her mother said with a smile and nudged Dawnpaw. The light orange and white apprentice laughed a bit and padded to Tigerpaw.

She didn't know whether or not to tell anyone about her visit with Blackfoot or not, so she went with the latter. "Is this because you're going to become a warrior soon?" She asked as she approached him and sat in front of the tabby tom. He was 14 moons and she was 12. Apprentices usually became warriors between the age of 15 and 16 moons but in some circumstances, they can become warriors at 14 moons depending on how they're training is going.

"Nope. Snowheart said nothing about me becoming a warrior early." He said as he took another bite. Snowheart was his replacement mentor since Mistyheart was nursing kits. "Then why are you extra

happy?" She asked, starting to get annoyed. "Because happiness is good, Dawnpaw, it can be found in the most darkest of times, ok?" He snapped and Dawnpaw narrowed her eyes as a slight growl escaped her lips. She stalked off and passed Nightclaw, her replacement mentor after Blackfoot's death, and the black warrior padded to Tigerpaw. Dawnpaw wanted to her none of what they had to say so she just padded to the nursery.

The familiar scent of milk greeted her and she immediately smiled, despite what had happened earlier. She padded in and saw Mistyheart laying down, gazing down at her kits with a smile on her face. "How are you doing?" Dawnpaw asked as she sat down in front of her. Mistyheart looked up at Dawnpaw and smiled. "Great, and so are the kits. The other kits can't wait until they can play with them." The blue gray queen said with a chuckle as she smiled. Dawnpaw laughed and then there was a moment of silence between them.

"Do you have any interest in having kits of your own?" Mistyheart asked as she gazed at the apprentice's seemingly golden eyes. Dawnpaw frowned and thought for a moment. "They seem nice to have and it would be good for the clan and to pass down genes but... I don't know. I'd need to find the right tom first." Dawnpaw said with a nod. "That's good. Tigerpaw seems nice." Mistyheart said with a wink. "Why does everyone keep saying that?" Dawnpaw blurted out and Mistyheart looked at her quizzically. "Who says that?" She asked as she tilted her head to the side slightly.

"Um, no one." Dawnpaw said quickly and started to pad away but Mistyheart stopped her in her tracks. "Fine, it was Blackfoot. He visited me in my dreams last night." Dawnpaw said with a smile and Mistyheart smiled too. "The night he died was when he visited me the first time. And then a few days before our kits were born he visited me and noted that Tigerpaw seems to like you." She said with a smirk. "Like I said to Blackfoot, I will not believe that Tigerpaw likes me." Dawnpaw said with a disbelieving laugh.

"Whatever you say, Dawnpaw." Mistyheart said with a smile and Dawnpaw laughed and then padded out of the nursery.

Chapter 4

"Come on, Dawnpaw! This is not how you train. You want to be a warrior don't you? Then work harder!" Nightclaw exclaimed, clearly disappointed in Dawnpaw's training session. Tigerpaw looked at Nightclaw and grimaced. "She's clearly distracted, Nightclaw. Maybe give her a minute to clear her head?" He suggested with an attitude. "No. Enemies don't wait for anyone's head to be cleared before a fight. I'll show her how it's done." Nightclaw hissed and tackled Dawnpaw and pinned her down with a thud. She then let Dawnpaw get up but soon slammed her head into the ground. "Would Blackfoot let you fight like this?" Nightclaw hissed with distaste.

Nightclaw kept her head down to the ground, unknowingly and slightly suffocating the apprentice. Dawnpaw heard her mentor's remark and she yowled angrily. She then scrambled out from under her mentor's grasp and tackled, her claws unsheathing on instinct. She slashed at Nightclaw's nose, drawing blood. She slashed her eyes and then kicked some dust up into them and pinned her down while she was dazed. "You have no right to bring him into this!" Dawnpaw yowled and bit at the black warrior's neck and tasted blood.

"Dawnpaw, Dawnpaw!" Snowfur said and grabbed the pale orange and white apprentice by the scruff and pulled her off Nightclaw. Dawnpaw took a deep breath and then had a look of horror at what she had done. She then ran off into the forest at full speed. "Dawnpaw!" Tigerpaw exclaimed and he soon pelted after her.

Dawnpaw ran to the river and once she was there, she stopped and sat down and looked at herself int eh reflection of the clear, rushing water. She had a somewhat blood-stained muzzle and she frowned. She dipped her muzzle in the water to wash it off. She took some laps of the cold water and she took her paw and dipped it in the river and dabbed herself with some of the refreshing water. She sighed and closed her eyes, taking a moment to process her

surroundings.

The rushing water of the river, the chirping of the birds. The sound of prey scurrying in the tall grass, the warm sun on her pelt countered by the cooling river water. She then opened her eyes and exhaled another sigh. She heard rustling in the underbrush and tensed for a moment, before smelling the familiar scent of Tigerpaw; pine. He then revealed himself. When he blocked the sun, he looked older and more... handsome. Dawnpaw shook the thought away and allowed him to sit beside her.

"I don't like Nightclaw." He bluntly said with a frown. "Me neither." She admitted. "She didn't have to say what she said." Dawnpaw said with no emotion. "I know. It was uncalled for. But I think she did it on purpose because she knew it would make you fight. But she still shouldn't have done that." Tigerpaw admitted. Snowfur said that we were done training and she gave that black cat an earful. Snowfur sent me to fetch you and to return when you wanted to." He said. When he said 'black cat' Dawnpaw noticed he said with distaste. He then looked at Dawnpaw and smiled.

Dawnpaw noticed this and she looked up at him. "What?" She asked with a frown. "Nothing." He said with a smile as he gazed at her golden eyes. She raised an eyebrow and he got to his paws. "Where are we going?" She asked as she followed the brown tabby tom. "You'll see when we get there." He said with a smirk as she caught up to him and stood beside him. After a moment of padding along, she noticed that he was getting closer to her, and that their flanks were almost touching.

"Wait, do you smell that?" She asked as she stopped in her tracks. He whipped around and started smelling the air. "Wait, nevermind." She said with a smirk and padded along. "You did that on purpose." He whined with a wide smile. "You coming?" She asked as she turned her head and let her tail tip sway gracefully. He smirked and caught up with her. "I'm supposed to be leading." He said with a smile. "Then do it." She said with a smirk. Tigerpaw rolled his eyes playfully with a smile and bumped her hips with his. She did the same as they made their way.

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Tigerpaw stopped and sniffed the air. "This way." He said and bounded over to what looks like a large badger nest. Dawnpaw ruffled her fur and started pacing. "T-Tigerpaw-" She started but he rushed over to her and placed his paw over hers. "It's ok. It's safe. Would I ever hurt you?" He asked with a small smile and there was something to his eyes when he said it that way. There was a sparkling that was never there before. Dawnpaw smiled and he smiled too. He led the way down the large hole.

At first it was big enough for them both to fit in, with space between them. But then it gradually got smaller and darker as they went deeper underground. Their flanks were touching and Dawnpaw noticed the sudden closeness. She felt heat rush through her pelt and to her ears and nose especially. He felt warm and inviting and it dragged her impossibly closer, since the other side of his flank was touching the wall. "Scared?" He asked, and even though she couldn't see, she knew he was smirking. She didn't say anything except moved a couple inches away so she wasn't smothering him.

"No, it's fine." He said. Dawnpaw smiled and went back to his warmth. A few moments passed and they saw light at the end of the tunnel. Tigerpaw chuckled and bounded forward. Dawnpaw followed and they skidded to a stop at a large, deep hole in the ground that looked like another planet. It was beautiful. There was smooth stone on the bottom with dirt making up the wall. There was a stream that babbled on the right side and goes out through the wall. There was moss patches dotted around and the best part was that there was a hole in the ceiling but it was getting covered by overgrown grass, twigs, and trees growing near it, casting some sun spots, which caught the stream perfectly. It was perfect.

"What do you think?" He asked with a smile as he turned to her. "What do I think? I love it!" Dawnpaw exclaimed as her tail tip quivered with excitement. "How did you find this place?" She asked. "I found it while I was on a patrol a couple moons back. No one goes near it because it was an old badger den but it's now abandoned, but they still don't go near it." He explained with a smile. "So, when the time comes, I'm going to bring a she cat here, one that I love, and I'm going to ask her to be mates with me.

Hopefully she'll say yes." He said with a smile as he padded forward and looked around. Dawnpaw felt a sting of jealousy prick at her heart and she didn't know why. She also noticed that the inside of his ears were a deep pink. He was blushing, and that made her smile.

"Who? Which she cat would it be?" She couldn't help but ask him as she padded forward and joined him. "I don't know. But one day we'll both know." He said with a smile as he turned to her. "Why will I know?" She asked frantically. What was she trying to get out of him? She didn't even know. "Because you're my best friend. And you'll be the first to know." He said as he padded away but turned back to look at her. "Oh." She said, her mood deflated. Dawnpaw the began to follow him through the tunnel but stopped in her tracks and smirked. "I think you're lying." Dawnpaw said with a smirk as she sat down. He stopped in his tracks and turned to face her.

"I think you're lying." She stated bluntly with a look of playful denial. "About the she cats. I think you have a secret crush already. I mean, you're going to be a warrior in the next moon and warriors get mates. And you aren't friends with any she cat warriors besides Snowfur and my mother. So your little crush has to be an apprentice." She assumed 'evilly' as she did circles around him, dragging her tail along both sides of his flank, and dragging it along his chin and rubbing her flank against his chest. "Loss for words?" She asked with a smirk as she stopped and sat down in front of the flustered tom.

"You did that on purpose." He said with a smirk. "Which one is it? Cinderpaw? Silverpaw? Lilypaw? Velvetpaw?" She asked smugly. "I'm not answering." He said. "Is it me?" She dared to ask. She saw the inside of his ears turning bright pink at the mention of him liking her. He then turned but not before giving her smug look. "I'm not answering, Dawnpaw." He called as he entered the dark tunnel. Dawnpaw chuckled and padded after him.

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They entered camp and Snowfur saw them. She narrowed her eyes and stalked over to Tigerpaw. "You were supposed to be here long

ago! What took so long? And not even any prey? Really?" She snapped, her neck fur ruffling. When Snowfur was mad, she was mad for the rest of the day. And she was rarely mad. She got mad at Nightclaw, so that's why she's giving Tigerpaw an earful. Dawnpaw didn't hear any of what the white warrior was saying so she tuned it all out. Tigerpaw then sighed and dragged her away to the apprentices den. She didn't notice Snowfur had stalked somewhere else to give another cat a hard time.

Once we were in the safety of the den, he sat down with a slump. "I've never been belittled like *that* before." He said softly. "I know. She's just mad at Nightclaw. She didn't mean what she said earlier. Do you want to go see Mistyheart?" Dawnpaw suggested. He immediately looked up and then smiled and nodded his head. Dawnpaw giggled and they padded to the nursery. They slipped in and found that the three other queens were huddled over the blue gray she cat and cooing while their kits were playing together. "What's all the fuss?" Tigerpaw asked with a laugh.

"They opened their eyes." Mistyheart said excitedly. Dawnpaw smiled wide and quickly padded over and crouched down. The kits were active today, they were crawling around and meowing. Blackkit crawled over to Dawnpaw and she saw he had the same eyes as his dad; yellow green. He crawled between her front paws and curled up in her chest fur and dozed off. She gently licked the top of his head with a smile. Rainkit had blue eyes and Jadekit has her mother's eyes; pale and light green ones.

"When can they play?" Birchkit whined. He was four moons old and he wanted more playmates. "When they're old enough." His mother, Dapplefur, scolded. "Yeah Birchkit. But you don't have to wait to play with me." Aspenkit, his sister, said as she jumped at him and tackled him. Dapplefur chuckled and Dawnpaw smiled. She can tell which one will be a strong warrior. Dawnpaw yawned and laid on her side and rested her head, making sure not to hurt Blackkit. "Go to sleep, Dawnpaw. You need it." Mistyheart said kindly. Dawnpaw could tell that being a mother had already gotten to Mistyheart. Dawnpaw smiled with a nod and slowly got up. She took Blackkit by the scruff and placed him near his mother, who licked him.

Tigerpaw said he would stay and talk to Mistyheart about what had

happened earlier and she nodded and padded to the apprentices den alone. She circled her moss bed and aid down, quickly falling asleep.

A black cat chased her in her dreams. "It's your fault he's dead! You couldn't get up off your selfish, foxhearted back! *You* are the reason he died, and you better believe that for the rest of your life! You are a waste of everything for this clan. It should have been you! It's your fault, it's your fault, it's your fault!" The black cat said. Dawnpaw was running as fast as she could but her paws wouldn't work. The memory of Blackfoot in the badger's jaws was right in front of her. She couldn't move, couldn't blink, couldn't look away. The black cat kept repeating that it was her fault that he's dead. The cat then leaptat her and thehy became dust with the wind.

"It's my fault!" She exclaimed as she woke with a start. Tigerpaw was looming over her, ready to prod her again. She could tell it was still dark out but she knew it was her best friend. "You were screaming and crying and your legs were going a mile a minute." He said, scared for his friend. "I-I was?" She asked. She then remembered her dream and she hung her head and repeated what was seared into her mind; "It's my fault."

Chapter 5

"What? What's your fault? Is this about Blackfoot? I thought we were over this." Tigerpaw said, an annoyed edge to his voice. "What do you mean?" Dawnpaw asked. She wasn't able to fathom that he would actually say that. "You were doing so good and now you let a stupid nightmare get to you." He said as he glared at her and his voice was laced with anger. Dawnpaw narrowed her eyes at the brown tabby tom. "I thought you were my best friend, but I guess not." She snapped. She then ran out of camp, leaving Tigerpaw behind.

When she was sure she had gotten far enough away from camp, she slowed and just walked aimlessly around. She let her paws guide her wherever they wanted to go and she bumped into a wall. This is what happens when she trusts her paws. She shook her head and looked around. She growled when she realized where se subconsciously went; to Tigerpaw's hideout. She yowled angrily and slumped to the ground and ended up sobbing.

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She woke to the sun high in the sky. She forgot where she was for a moment and then remembered what happened during the night. She scoffed and got to her paws. She stretched with a yawn and felt her stomach growl. She padded to the tunnel and made the not-so-short journey to the top. Once the blinding sun gleamed on her pale orange and white pelt, she sniffed the air for the scent of prey. She immediately smelt mouse and she padded to the scent. Once she got closer to the scent, she crouched and continued to search, stopping every few seconds to listen to the sounds of the forest beneath her paws.

She soon saw the mouse and she crouched lower, keeping her tail above the undergrowth and made herself invisible to the mouse. As she got closer, she shifted her weight into her back paws and she wriggled her hips and lunged at the mouse and killed it on impact. She smiled proud and laid down to eat.

As she ate, a strange scent travelled to her nose. She got to her paws and sniffed the air. The fur on her back rose at the familiar smell of fox hit her hard. She heard rustling and out jumped a red flash that tackled her. It snarled and bit at her throat. Dawnpaw was taken by surprise but soon regained herself. She unsheathed her claws and slashed at the fox's muzzle, drawing blood. She paid attention to it's eyes and because if it couldn't see, that was better than one that could.

The fox snarled and while it was dazed, Dawnpaw took the opportunity to climb onto it's back. She raked her claws down it's back and it tried bucking her off. To her dismay, it succeeded with doing so. As Dawnpaw lay on the ground, regaining herself, the fox was quicker and it smacked her into a tree with it's paw and with all it's force. She crashed into the tree with a loud thud and fell to the ground. An image of Blackfoot and the badger came into her mind and she slumped down with a wince after trying to get up. The fox approached her with it's teeth bared and saliva dripping from it's jowels. It looked so evil and it looked like it was smiling.

A voice screamed in Dawnpaw's head to get up, to fight, to do something. "I'm sorry." She whispered as she braced for the fox to kill her. Everything happened so quickly; leaves rustled, cats bursted through the undergrowth, the fox ran off after being attacked, Tigerpaw yelling at her to get up, then darkness...

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She woke in the medicine cat den and looked around. "Oh thank StarClan you're ok. It's a miracle you came out of that virtually unscathed." Flamepaw said as she hurried over to her sister. She nuzzled Dawnpaw and purred. The orange and white apprentice had virtually no emotion at that point. Tigerpaw rushed over as well and started yelling questions at her, his neck fur rising. "Why didn't you fight!? You were just going to let that mouse-brained fox kill you! Why, Dawnpaw, why!?" He yelled angrily. "Tigerpaw, please." Flamepaw hissed as she backed him up away from her sister. "Here, eat these." The orange medicine cat apprentice said as she padded to her storage and returned with herbs and berries in her mouth. She dropped them at Dawnpaw's paws and she looked down at them with distaste.

"What is it?" She asked as she rolled a berry under her paw. "Chamomile to soothe your mind, juniper berries to calm yourself, and goatweed for... grief. We should've given you goatweed long before this incident." Flamepaw said the last part softly. "I'm fine." Dawnpaw said as she gave a reassuring smile that definitely make them think she was any more better. "Eat it." Flamepaw demanded. "As your future medicine cat, you have no choice." Flamepaw said 'matter of factly' and stood tall and proud. "You should listen to her." Tigerpaw said with a sort of attitude. Both she cats gave him a look and he gave one back. Dawnpaw rolled her eyes and lapped up the herbs and berries.

"Happy?" Dawnpaw said with an attitude after she swallowed the calming cures. "Yes." She said with a nod. "And I'm also glad that the patrol Tigerpaw was on found you just in time." Flamepaw said softly so that only her sister could hear her. "You know he cares about you. When he came in here, he was freaking out. He thought you had... but anyway, he was scared, Dawnpaw. We all were." Flamepaw said softly. "Then why'd he seem annoyed when I needed him?" Dawnpaw snapped quietly. "Doesn't seem like a good friend to me." She said softly, mostly to herself, and with distaste. "He is, Dawnpaw. Just give him some time." Flamepaw advised and Dawnpaw rolled her eyes. She said bye and then stalked out, purposely hitting Tigerpaw in the shoulder on her way out.

When she walked out, every cat in the clearing stared at her. She stopped in her tracks and felt an anxious heat rush through her pelt and travel to her ears. She hurried to the apprentices den and lucky for her, it was empty since everyone was out training or on patrol. She sat down on her moss bed and let her shoulders droop. *I can't believe I would've let myself die if it weren't for those cats.* She thought as she stared down at her paws. She smelt the scent of pine and she looked up to see Tigerpaw pad into the den.

"I thought you were going to die today. After our fight last night and me not being able to see you and apologize ever again..." He said as he padded closer to her and sat in front of her. She didn't know what to say. "You can stay mad at me forever, I would understand but I just need to say-" He said but was cut off by Dawnpaw. "I'm not mad." She never meant to say it but it was like

her body didn't want to stay mad at him. "Ok, that's good, but I need to tell you something; I l-" He started but he was cut off once more, but by Leafstar's yowl. "Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey, gather beneath the Highrock."

The two apprentices padded out and saw that two kits were standing underneath it. Dovekit and Frostkit. "We have two kits who are becoming apprentices today. This is a critical time in any cat's life. They learn important skills that will be greatly needed when they become ThunderClan warriors." Leafstar said with a smile. "Frostkit already seems like a good hunter, with his seemingly agile movements. Jayflight, you have mentored three apprentices before Frostkit. Please pass all you know and your faithfulness onto this apprentice." Leafstar said and the two cats touched noses. "From this day on, Frostkit will be known as Frostpaw until he has earned his warrior name." Leafstar said with a smile.

"Dovekit will make a great fighter one day and with the help of Willowpelt, she will be even greater." Leafstar said. Dawnpaw felt excitement for her mother. The two touched noses and Leafstar smiled. "From this day forward until she has earned her warrior name, Dovekit will be known as Dovepaw." The dappled leader said proudly. "Frostpaw, Dovepaw! Frostpaw, Dovepaw!" The clan cheered. Leafstar jumped off the Highrock and Dawnpaw padded towards the apprentices den but Leafstar stopped her. "Dawnpaw." She said and the apprentice turned and so did Tigerpaw.

The dappled leader flicked her tail to join her and Dawnpaw turned to Tigerpaw. "I'll meet you in the den." He said softly and sweetly and without warning, he licked her ear a couple times in... well Dawnpaw couldn't figure that out. She let a purr slip from her throat and she smiled at him and they parted ways. She padded to the den and padded in and Leafstar was sitting and licking her paw.

"So I heard some troubling news today. I heard you got attacked by a fox and that you didn't fight back. Why is that?" Leafstar asked. "For yours and everyone's information, I did fight back. I just..." Dawnpaw said but hung her head. Leafstar nodded but spoke her second question. "Why would you have let yourself die like that, at the jaws of a predator?" She asked, seemingly offended. Dawnpaw

shrugged her shoulders and didn't speak. "Well I'll let you go. I don't want to upset you further." She said and Dawnpaw nodded and hurried out and into the apprentices den.

Tigerpaw perked his head up when he saw that his friend had entered the den. "Congratulations." She called to the brother and sister and they nodded with a smile. She padded to Tigerpaw and since they were away from earshot of the other apprentices, who were busy getting to know the two new ones, they spoke. "So what did she want?" He asked as they sat close together. "She wanted to know why I would've let the fox kill me. I told her that I did fight and that I just kind of... gave up." She admitted as she flicked her eyes and hung her head.

"It was because of me wasn't it?" Tigerpaw asked, his horror struck face giving him away. "Not just you. Yes, that fight last night contributed to it but it was built up things over time. Ever since Blackfoot's death I've felt empty inside and alone." She admitted. She looked up into his green eyes and saw something. Offense? His facial expression screamed hurt all over. "Not that you aren't enough." She added quickly, noticing his expression. "It's just that losing a best friend was hard but losing another? That just sent me over the edge." Dawnpaw admitted.

"No. I would never leave you or try to hurt you on purpose, Dawnpaw. I love you too much." He said with a smile. Dawnpaw smiled too and leaned her head on his shoulder as they laid down. "As a friend." He added quickly, realizing what he had said. His ears turned pink again and Dawnpaw chuckled. They ended up taking a cat nap that lasted through the whole night.

Chapter 6

Dawnpaw woke up happier than ever. She smiled as she saw Tigerpaw was next to her. Nothing could tear them apart and she knew that. She licked his forehead and then padded out of the apprentices den. Everything seemed bright and happy out, compared to her usual gloomy surroundings and behavior. Today she was happy. She padded to the fresh kill pile and picked out a rabbit. She carried it to a sunny spot and ate.

Her mother padded over to her and Dawnpaw stood. "I don't want sympathy." She said as her mother was in earshot. "Ok, I won't. I'm just glad you're ok." She said with a smile and they nuzzled each other. "Congrats on Dovepaw." She said, eager to change the subject. Willowpelt smiled. "Thanks. I'll have to wake her soon. We explored the territory yesterday but we still have some to go over today." She said and Dawnpaw nodded. Tigerpaw padded out and shook out his pelt at the entrance to the den.

Dawnpaw looked over and was staring for too long. "What are you-oh." Her mother said as she turned her head and saw Tigerpaw stretching, his muscles rippling under his pelt. "I'll leave you alone." She said with a wink and a smirk. For once, Dawnpaw wasn't annoyed. She just smiled and knew that her ears were extra pink. He padded over and took a mouse for himself. He laid beside her they laughed and talked as they ate. Snowfur padded to them and sat down with a smile. "I need to borrow Tigerpaw for the day. I have something special for him to do today. Sorry Dawnpaw, but he can't train with you today." She said with a frown.

The fur on her neck rose and her eyes widened. "No, it's ok." She said with a forced smile as she tried not to slip up. Snowfur smiled and got to her paws. "When you're ready." She said with a smile and padded away. Once she was out of earshot, Tigerpaw spoke. "It's not ok, what's wrong?" He asked and Dawnpaw turned to him. "I don't want to be alone with Nightclaw. I... I just can't. I fear that she'll

actually attack me when she's alone with me." Dawnpaw explained, suddenly losing her appetite replaced by anxiety.

"If you fear for your well being, you should talk to Leafstar before she gets up." Tigerpaw said. Dawnpaw nodded and out of the corner of her eye, she saw Nightclaw emerge from the warrior's den, her green eye filled with hate as they scanned the clearing. Her green orbs settled on what they were lookng for; Dawnpaw. She pracically smiled evilly and Dawnpaw picked up her pace to the leader's den.

After asking permission to enter, she hurried in and looked at the entrance. "Dawnpaw, what's wrong?" She asked, seeing her visibly shaken form. "I-I can't train with Nightclaw today. We're going to be alone and I-" Dawnpaw said but she was hyperventilating and she smelt Nightclaw's scent. The black cat padded in and Dawnpaw tensed and stoped breathing all together. Leafstar looked over and saw how tense her clanmate was. Leafstar got to her paws and put on a leader front. "Nightclaw. It is extremely rude to barge in on a private conversation, especially one between a leader." She said sternly as she swished her tail and gave a dominant growl to scare her away.

Nightclaw growled but walked out, her tail lashing angrily. "Dawnpaw, breathe." She said softly. Dawnpaw let out the breath she was holding and calmed. "I think I get what you're saying. Nightclaw can be a bit fierce. I didn't think of the consequences of assigning you to her, you just needed another mentor. I'll have you train with Brambleheart today, see how you like him instead." Leafstar said with a sweet smile and Dawnpaw smiled back. Both Leafstar and Dawnpaw padded out and Leafstar looked for the light brown tabby tom.

They padded over to him eating a rabbit. "Hello Leafstar, Dawnpaw. What's the interest with me today?" He teasingly asked with a laugh. Leafstar smiled and looked at Dawnpaw. "I would like you to train Dawnpaw today. She's been having issues with Nightclaw and I believe that this will be the answer. "Huh, it's unusual for another cat to train another's apprentice. But anything to get you away from Nightclaw. Me and my friends joke that she has ShadowClan blood in her and that's why her pelt is black." He said with a laugh and Dawnpaw nodded with a smile and even their leader was stifling a

laugh.

"Thank you, Brackenheart." Leafstar said and she sat down. "I need to have a private chat with Brackenheart." Leafstar said with a smile and Dawnpw nodded and padded to Tigerpaw. "So I'm guessing that Brackenheart is your new mentor?" He asked as he got to his paws. Dawnpaw nodded. "But listen, I have to go. Snowfur is waiting. You'll be fine." He said with a smile as he licked her forehead. Dawnpaw nodded with a sigh as she watched him leave. She sat down and waited for Brackenheart.

In the meantime, Nightclaw found her again. "Ready to train?" She asked as a sly smile crept onto her lips. Dawnpaw's fur ruffled and she scrambled to face the black warrior. "I-I'm I-" She stuttered with fear and Nightclaw gave a disgusted look at her. "Spit it out." She spat as she got closer. "Leave her alone, Nightclaw." Brackenheart said as he backed her up. She knew she couldn't take him on by herself because he was such a big cat so she only hissed and stalked off. "I swear her father was of ShadowClan descent." He said with distaste as he padded to Dawnpaw.

"We should leave now before she comes back." He said and he led the way to the sandy hollow.

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After awhile of training, Brackenheart suggested a break. Nightclaw never had her take breaks. "You don't talk much, do you? Well maybe not to new cats." He said and Dawnpaw looked at him. "Sorry. It's just that normally Tigerpaw is with me and I just feel comfortable around cats when he's with me." Dawnpaw explained. "Don't apologize, it's ok. I was just like you when I was younger." He said with a laugh and Dawnpw smiled. "I wasn't supposed to tell you this but Leafstar wanted me to be leniant on you after all that's happened but I didn't because how is any cat supposed to learn like that?" He said and Dawnpaw nodded. "Shall we continue?" He asked with a smile and Dawnpaw nodded and she got to her paws.

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After training, they took their time getting back. It was sunset and

Dawnpaw felt she made real progress than when she did with Nightclaw. "Thank you, Brackenheart." She said with a smile and he smiled back and dipped his head. "Anytime." He said with a smile and padded to the fresh kill pile. Leafstar padded up to Dawnpaw and she turned to look at her leader. "So what did you think?" She asked with a smile. "It was a lot better. I feel I actually got closer to being a warrior than I did with Nightclaw." She said with a smile. "That's good. He will be your mentor from now on, and I wil give an announcement later." She said with a smile and Dawnpaw nodded.

Tigerpaw still wasn't back and she started to worry and pace. Awhile later, it was dusk and he returned with Snowfur at his heels. He was carrying a mouthful of prey and so was Snowfur. Wow. She padded to him and he was ecstatic. "You worried me." She said as she licked his cheek. He smiled and sat down. "I get to be-" He started but Leafstar's yowel silenced what he was going to say. "All cats old enough to catch their own prey, gather beneath the Highrock."

They padded over and Tigerpaw smiled wide. "Tonight is a very special meeting. One of our apprentices is becoming a warrior tonight." She said and Dawnpaw looked at Tigerpaw with a wide smile. "Tigerpaw, please join me on the Highrock." She said and he exciedly got to his paws and jumped onto the boulders. "Tigerpaw, you have fought long and hard for this day. With the help of both Mistyheart and Snowfur, you have learned the ways of the warrior code. You will now be known as Tigerstorm. StarClan, take this young cat as a warrior of ThunderClan and light his path." Leafstar said and she turned to him. He licked her shoulder in respect and she smiled proud. "Tigerstorm must now sit vigil and guard the camp while we sleep, knowing we are safe." She said and the clan cheered. "Tigerstorm! Tigerstorm!"

"But this meeting is not over. Brackenheart will now be training Dawnpaw until she has received her warrior name." She said with a smile and they met up to touch noses. "That will be all." She said with a smile and they both jumped down and Tigerpaw- no, *storm,* got caught in a herd of congratulations before he could reach Dawnpaw. Once the cats cleared, he padded to her. There was an air that Dawnpaw couldn't place. She felt like a kit compared to him

now. "Congratulations, *Tigerstorm*." She said with a smile. He smiled and flicked his tail to the clearing. She nodded but then remembered something. "How am I going to sleep? I'm going to have a nightmare without you." She said with a frown. He shook his head and licked her forehead comfortingly. It sent chills up her spine and she suppressed a shudder. She smiled and licked his cheek before padding to the apprentices den.

It felt empty without him. Her best friend was now gone and out of the den. She sighed and padded to his old moss bed and curled up. It smelt like his scent and she fell asleep quickly.

Chapter 7

Dawnpaw woke to the sound of birds chirping and the sun shining in the cracks of the den. She got to her paws and padded out, eager to see Tigerstorm. But to her dismay, he wasn't there. A cat must've set him free of his vigil. She sighed sadly and kicked dust as she padded to the fresh kill pile. "You seem gloomy." Brackenheart said as he approached her. She looked up and shrugged. "I just wanted to see Tigerstorm." She said and he nodded. "I relieved him of his vigil duty awhile ago. But don't worry, you'll get to see him today." He said with a smile and she smiled back and picked out a mouse.

She ate quickly, eager to train and eager to become a warrior with Tigerstorm. They padded to the sandy hollow and he tackled her out of nowhere. She yowled in surprise and instinctively unsheathed her claws and fought back. He slashed at her 'enemy' not realizing it was Brackenheart. She batted hard at her surprise attacker and climbed onto his back and bit his shoulder hard. He yowled in pain and screamed her name with a laugh. Realizing it was her mentor, she sheathed her claws and quickly got off of him.

"Sorry." She said with a bashful smile. He chuckled and licked his minor wounds. "It's alright. At least now I know you can hold your own." He said with a smile. She nodded and got to her paws. "So, how about a new trick?" He said and Dawnpaw nodded eagerly.

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At the end of their training seesion, they arived back at camp well after midday and it was just beginning to become sunset. She ate once more and then when she was done, she padded to the nursery to see how Mistyheart and her kits were doing. What she didn't expect to find was Tigerstorm on his back, letting the kits jump on him and 'attack' him. She stood there watching the scene unfold in front of her. The kits grow up so fast. They were at least a week old and they were already playing. But what caught Dawnpaw off

guard so much was how grown up Tigerstorm is. He would make a great father as well.

Dawnpaw shrugged off the thought and padded in more and as if on cue, all three kits ran over to her- or what they thought was running- and jumped up at her paws. Dawnpaw giggled and pretended to be attacked like Tigerstorm did. "Oh no! Enemies attacking me!" She exclaimed playfully. "Yes, stay down ShadowClan warrior!" Blackkit exclaimed as he struggled to keep hold on Dawnpaw's chest. "Oh, a ShadowClan warrior? I'll show you, brave ThunderClan cat!" She said and flopped him on his back tickled him with her tail. He giggled and Rainkit bit at Dawnpaw's tail. She flicked it around, making it a toy for the three kits.

She looked up and saw Tigerstorm looking at her with admiration sparkling in her eyes. He looked away quickly and his ears turned pink with blush. She smiled and then spoke. "So how was your first day of being a warrior?" She asked and he laughed and looked at her. "I didn't do much. When I was done sitting vigil I went to sleep and then when I got up, I ate and then I was on patrol for the rest of the day. It's good to hear cats call me my warrior name." He said with a smile as he stood tall and proud.

"And you should. I' proud of you, Tigerstorm." Mistyheart said with a smile. Dawnpaw smiled and she swung her tail again to spark their interest. "So did Brackenheart tell you how soon you are to becoming a warrior?" He asked and Dawnpa shook her head. "No. But in the next two moons I will be. I just know it." She said and Tigerstorm nodded.

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They spent awhile in the nursery, talking and playing with the kits and bonding with them. Now, Dawnpaw was trying to get comfortable in a moss bed, and it wasn't working out so well. She laid on her back, looking up at the ceiling of the den. She sighed, for she couldn't sleep. Thoughts of Tigerstorm unravelled in her mind and she soon found herself dozing off with thoughts of him and a smile on her face.

She felt prodding on her face and she blinked her eyes open and

looked up to see Tigerstorm. She smiled and so did he. He licked her forehead and she smiled wider. "Come with me." He whispered and she got to her paws. "Where are we going?" She whispered back and he chuckled. "You'll see." He whispered as the exited the den and bounded to the entrance of camp and ran a distance away from the clan.

Silverpelt was high in the sky and so was the almost full moon. A couple more days and there would be a gathering. They padded side by side and their flanks were touching. This time, Dawnpaw didn't move away. They padded to the abaondoned badger den and they padded in. Once they cleared the tunnel, memories started piling up. Her breathing became uneven and Tigerstorm noticed this. "Are you ok?" He asked as he wrapped his tail around her and let Dawnpaw rest her head on his shoulder.

The night of the argument, I came here and I fell asleep crying and then.." She said and he understood. "You have me and I'm never leaving you in a time of need again, ok?" He said softly and she nodded with a smile. They stared at each other in the moonlight for a moment, stars in their eyes. "We-we should go to sleep. That's why I brought you out here; so you can sleep peacefully in my paws." He said sweetly and Dawnpaw's heart melted at those words. He laid down and she laid beside him and quickly fell asleep in his paws, as he wished.

In her dreams, Dawnpaw saw five kits playing. Four of them looked brown but only one looked like her. She couldn't see much; it was blurry. An orange and white she cat was sitting and gazing down at the kits with another brown looking cat.

She woke and she felt cold on the side where Tigerstorm was last night. The nights are getting colder, which means leaf fall is on it's way. Tigerstorm wasn't in the den and her heart dropped at that. She liked seeing him right when she got up. As if on cue, he padded through the tunnel with prey in his mouth. "Good morning." He said throught the mouth full of fur he was getting. She smiled and he dropped a piece of prey at her paws and he licked her forehead and she smiled.

She ate quickly and then laid down and gazed at Tigerstorm. Maybe

she didn't mind that everyone thought they were going to become mates one day... She actually kind of liked him too. Her heart fluttered at the thought and she smiled. When he was done eating, he padded behind her and laid down and began to groom her pelt in the act of sharing tongues. She purred as he did so and she almost fell back to sleep.

Chapter 8

Two moons have passed since Tigerstorm's warrior ceremony. Now today she might become a warrior if she succeeds in her trial. "Ok, so hunt as much prey as you can and we'll see how you do." Brackenheart said and she excitedly padded into the forest to search for prey. Leaf fall as officially here but prey won't be becoming scarce for a little while yet so she should be ok today. She immediately smelt prey scent and she crouched down and stalked the rabbit. She saw its ears first and then its gray body. She crouched lower and kept her paw steps light. These animals relied on their hearing better than their eyesight and nose.

Once she was close enough, she wriggled her hips and leapt at the rabbit. Before she could land on it, it gave chase and so did she. She caught up to it and grabbed its leg and flung it around and then killed it swiftly. She buried it for later and padded on.

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After awhile, she had caught quite a bit. She successfuly hunted three rabbits, two mice, and four sparrows. She padded back to the sandy hollow with as much as she could carry at once. "I have more." She said and he nodded and helped her. Once they had all of the prey, they padded back to camp and placed it in the fresh kill pile. Brackenheart padded to Leafstar's den and Tigerstorm padded up to her. If she becomes a warrior, she will become one now since it's dusk. "You did good. I assume you'll be a warrior now." He said and she nodded "All cats old enough to cath their own prey, meet under the Highrock." She yowled and Dawnpaw smiled wide.

"Tonight is an important ceremony. One of our apprentices is becoming a warrior tonight. With the help of Blackfoot, who we all miss and who would be proud, and Brackenheart, Dawnpaw has learned the ways of the warrior code. Dawnpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to live by it, even at the cost of your

life?" She asked. "I do." Dawnpaw said as she stood tall and proud. "Then by the powers of StarClan, Dawnflower is now a warrior of Thunderclan. Dawnflower must sit vigil tonight and guard the camp and protect us while we sleep." Leafstar announced with a smile and Dawnflower licked her leader's shoulder in respect.

"Dawnflower! Dawnflower!" The clan cheered and she heard Tigerstorm cheer the loudest and she smiled. "That is all." She said and they both jumped down and the clan circled her in congratulations. The clan dispersed and she padded to Tigerstorm. They both smiled at each other. "Congratulations." He said softly and licked her ear multiple times. She laughed and licked his cheek and then padded to sit down for her vigil.

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Thunderheart, a senior warrior, padded out into the dawn light and relieved her of her vigil duty. She nodded with a smile and padded into the warriors den for the first time. She found an empty moss bed and quickly fell asleep. She had happy dreams of her and Tigerstorm together but when she woke up, she didn't know if it would actually happen. She padded out of the den and looked around. She saw Tigerstorm and bounded over to him. "Someone's happy." He said with a laugh and she nodded. "That's good." He said softly as he rested his nose to her forehead for a second before removing it. She smiled and gazed into his green eyes. "It's only because you're in my life." She said softly and licked his cheek. He smiled and purred as they nuzzled each other.

Dawnflower padded to the nursery and the kits came rushing over to her. They jumped up and tried biting her whiskers. She laughed and laid down in front of their mother. "So now that you're a warrior, what's your stance on kits?" Mistyheart asked right away with a smile. "I don't know. I still would need to find a tom first." She answered, loud enough for Tigerstorm to hear. He flicked his ear towards the conversation and she knew he had heard and she smiled. He was currently occupied with the kits and couldn't join the conversation.

"So, do you have any toms in mind?" Mistyheart asked as she gave a suggestive look. Dawnflower giggled and shrugged her shoulders.

"Maybe. I'm not sure yet. He's nice and kind and always there for me but I'm not quite sure if I like him that way or not, but my mind is suggesting otherwise." She said with a laugh. "How so?" Mistyheart asked. "Well, I've been having dreams of him and me raising a family and my mind always wanders to him. In fact, he's always on my mind." Dawnflower said and a pink tint rose to her ears. She glanced behind her for a split second to see Tigerstorm straining his ears to listen in. She smiled and turned back to a gaping Mistyheart.

She gasped and a wide smile spread on her lips. "I know who it is!" She exclaimed excitedly, even though she tried to be quiet. "We're acting like gossiping elders." Dawnflower said with a lauhg, trying to change the subject. Mistyheart flicked her tail to Tigerstorm and Dawnflower couldn't help but smile and look down to hide her excited grin. "Ahh, Dawnflower! I told you, but you didn't listen to me!" She said and batted at her front leg playfully. "Yeah. I just didn't want to believe that it was him who would like me. I mean, we're best friends." Dawnflower said but she whispered the last part so only Mistyheart could hear.

"Do you want him to ask you right away?" The blue gray queen asked. "I don't know. I do and I don't. I want to train Blackkit first but if he happens to ask me, that's fine, I just don't want kits until I'm done training Blackkit." Dawnflower said as she looked at the black and white kit wrestling with Tigerstorm.

"Did you get all that, Tigerstorm?" Dawnflower asked and he quickly scrambled up and a red tint was showing in his ears. "Get-get what?" He asked with a nervous laugh. "Don't pretend you weren't eavesdropping." She said with a wink and she got to her paws and walked past him, dragging her tail under his chin. He smirked and followed her out. She padded out of camp and he was still right beside her. "Where are we going?" He asked eagerly. "*I'm* going hunting, I don't know about you. But we're not going anywhere special." Dawnflower said and bumped her hips to his.

Chapter 9

A moon has passed since Dawnflower had become a warrior. She was out on patrol with Brackenheart, Jayflight, Snowfur, Dawnflower, and Tigerstorm, with Tigerstorm as the leader of the patrol. Nothing was unusual and everything was fine. They were on their way back to camp, when Tigerstorm stopped them. "You guys go back to camp, we'll be there later." He said and Brackenheart nodded and led them back to camp. "What are you doing?" She asked and he lead her to their special place. "Having some time with you." He said with a sweet smile. She smiled back and nuzzled him.

It was sunset and they were laying on their backs on a moss bed and just looking up at the golden rays that were turning pink and purple in the light. "It's so beautiful." She said with a smile and Tigerstorm turned his head over to her and gazed at her. "Yeah, it is." He said and she noticed he was looking at her. "But I see someone's beauty that beats the sky's any day." He said and Dawnflower smiled wide and felt a pink tint growing in her ears. "I need to tell you something, Dawnflower." He said as he got into a sitting position.

She did too, and faced him. "A couple moons into being an apprentice with you, I realized I had feelings for you. I wanted to wait to tell you until we were warriors and now's the day. When I told you I was going to bring a she cat down here to as her to be my mate, I was talking about you. I've never shown anyone else this place except for you. So, Dawnflower, would you like to be mates?" He asked with a hopeful smile. Dawnflower smiled and embraced him in a cat's version of a hug. "Of course. I've waited for this day forever, Tigerstorm." She said with a laugh and he smiled wide and licked her cheek lovingly and excitedly. She giggled and did the same back.

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They entered camp when it was just turning night. They padded

into the warriors den and they shared a moss bed together.

Dawnflower had that same dream from before, the one with the five kits and a brown tom, and it was more clearer this time but she still couldn't see the kits clearly. She could see her and Tigerstorm together, but she couldn't see the kits yet.

Chapter 10

Four moons have passed since Tigerstorm and Dawnflower became mates. It was midday and Leafstar jumped on the Highrcok and called for a meeting. They joined and saw three kits standing beneath it. Mistyheart's kits. Dawnflower smiled wide at the sight of Blackkit standing up there. I wonder if that's how Blackfoot looked at his son's age. "We have three kits who are ready for their next stage of life. Jadekit shows skill of stealth, so Sandheart will be her mentor. Teach her the ways of a faithful warrior's life, Sandheart." Leafstar said and they touched noses. "Tigerstorm, you are ready for your first apprentice. Teach young Rainkit the rights and wrongs of the world." She said and they touched noses. Dawnflower felt pride for her mate.

"It is time for your first aprentice too, Dawnflower, and with the attributes that his father passed on to you, do the same and pass down his knowledge. Blackfoot would be proud." Leafstar said and Dawnflower smiled wide and nodded in thanks and touched noses with an eager Blackkit, now paw. "From this day forward, until they have recieved their warrior names, Jadekit, Rainkit, and Blackkit will be known as Jadepaw, Rainpaw, and Blackpaw." Leafstar said and the clan cheered their names.

"Can we train?" Blackpaw asked excitedly as he bounced around. She chuckled and followed him wither her eyes as he did circledaround him. "Not today, we're going to explore the territory instead." She said with a smile and he stopped in front of her. "Ok." He said with a smile. "Can Rainpaw and Jadepaw join us?" He asked hopefully, his green eyes bright and energetic. "I'll ask." Dawnpaw said and she asked Tigerstorm if they can go together. He obviously agreed and so she asked Sandheart. "No offense, but I prefer my apprentices to learn one on one versus with their siblings. It distracts them." She said with an apologetic smile. "No problem." The orange and white warrior said and padded back to the three other cats.

"Just Rainpaw today." She said and he nodded. The two apprentices bounded to the entrance but waited for the two warriors. When they caught up with them, the two apprentices ran out of camp, chasing each other. The two warriors pickd up their pace to catch up with the two apprentices. An icy wind whipped through and ruffled Dawnflower's fur. She shivered and Tigerstorm pressed himself closer to her. She looked up at him and smiled. The icy winds didn't seem to phase the apprentices, they were too excited.

"Come back here, don't go too far. Stick with us." Dawnflower called and they picked their heads up and slid as they ran towards them. "Aren't you two cold?" She asked with a laugh. "We are, but we're too excited to think about it." Rainpaw said with a smile as she shook a clump of snow off of her paw. "Ok. But stick around us from now on." Tigerstorm said and they nodded.

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"See if you can smell anything." Dawnflower said as they were on top of a hill, overlooking ShadowClan territory. "I smell gross stuff." Blackpaw said with laugh and Dawnflower smiled. "That's what ShadowClan smells like." She said and he scrunched his nose up in disgust. "Me too." She admitted and padded down the hill to meet Tigerstorm and Rainpaw, who was also smelling the scent of ShadowClan. "We should show them WindClan next. It's on the way to Fourtrees and RiverClan." Dawnflower said and Tigerstorm nodded.

At the end of their exploration of the territory, Blackpaw and Rainpaw were sent to relax for the last few hours of daylight left. Dawnflower and Tigerstorm padded to the fresh kill pile and since it was leaf bare, they decided to share a rabbit and leave the rest for the others in the clan. "I can't wait until we have our own kits." Dawnflower said as she admired the three apprentices, fighting over a mouse and chasing each other.

"Me too. And they'll be perfect." Tigerstorm said with a purr and licked behind her ear. She purred as well and they finished eating and they retreated to the warriors den to sleep.

Chapter 11

Another four moons have passed since the kit's apprenticeship. Dawnflower and Blackpaw are already best friends but she hopes she won't eave him like how Blackfoot left her. Happiness has been a constant thing in Dawnflower's life, and she knows things are finally looking up. She couldn't sleep and since it was newleaf, she woke Tigerstorm up and went out for a walk. "I couldn't sleep." She explaind once they were out of camp. "Oh ok." He said and licked her ear.

They padded to their secret place and she laid down on a moss bed and gazed into Tigerstorm's green eyes. She smiled and placed her tail over his and bit at his ear playfully. He laughed and got to his paws and invited her to play. She recirpocated the movement and tackled him. They rolled a couple times and Dawnflower ended up tackling him again. There was something in his eyes that she had only seen a couple times before, when she was teasing him. She smirked and so did he.

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They woke and Dawnflower felt a lot better than she had a couple days ago. That's because she was in heat for the past week. "Good morning." She said as she turned and faced Tigerstorm, who went out hunting and got prey. She ate hers quickly and after a few minutes, they walked back to camp. They ran into Flamepelt, her sister, who had recieved her full medicine cat status and name many moons back, even before Dawnflower earned her warrior name. "Hey Dawnflower, Tigersto-" She said but she rapidly started sniffing Dawnflower. "What? Do I smell like mouse dung?" She asked.

"You smell... different. Like something changed about you and that something is totally different." She said. She looked between the both of them. "Wait, why are you out so earl-" She started but then gasped. "Oh my StarClan!" She yowled in surprise and backed away. "You... you..." She said but she couldn't finish. "Yes, I know."

Dawnflower said with a smile and laugh and Tigerstorm smiled. "Well, I'm just going to fnish gathering herbs." Flamepelt said awkwardly and shuffled away into the undergrowth.

They laughed and padded the rest of the way to camp. Willowpelt saw them walk in and she padded to them. "Walking in early and with no prey. I wonder what went down." She said with a wink and a smirk. "Is everyone going to say that? We didn't do anything." Tigerstorm said with a smile, trying to cover up his lie. "You're a bad liar." Willowpelt said with a smile as she padded away. "So I guess now everyone knows. But that doesn't mean we have kits. It doesn't always happen." Tigerstorm said Dawnflower nodded. For some reason, it kind of stung to know that they might not have kits at this time after all.

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"Great, Blackpaw!" Dawnflower said as he successfully hunted a mouse for the first time. He purred and waved his tail around excitedly. He then dug a small hole and buried it to take for later. "You're getting better everyday." Dawnflower said with a smile. "Well with my best friend as a mentor, how couldn't I do good?" He said as he tried nuzzling her but only ended up nuzzling her chest since she was taller than him. An excited, warm feeling pricked at her heart knowing that Blackpaw considered her a best friend. She nuzzled him with a purr and hen he asked a sudden question.

"What was my father like?" It taken Dawnflower aback and she felt a pang of sadness tug at her heart but she shoved it away; she was happy now, and that's all she needed. She didn't want to live in the past anymore. "Well, he was an amazing tom. The day he died, he fought with courage and bravery and that's what any cat asks of another and he did that perfectly. I was best friends with him and when he died, I blamed it on myself." Dawnflower admitted.

"I was never told that before. Why did you blame yourself?" He asked softly. "Well a badger attacked our camp and it flung me into a rock when I attacked it and then it went for Blackfoot and..." She said and she cleared her throat and took a deep breath. "And I saw that badger kill him and I was just laying there, acting like a kit doing nothing and hiding in a corner when I could've done

something. And then after, I fell into a deep dark hole of depression. And then Tigerstorm saved me; literally. And ever since the day he saved me, I was getting better until he asked me to be mates with him and that was the one thing I was missing; love. And that's what brought me to the cat I am today." Dawnflower said with a smile.

He smiled too. "It's a happy ending. But how did Tigerstorm save you?" He asked and Dawnflower looked away. "That's another story for when you're older." She said with a forced smile. "So, back to training." She said, eager to change the subject.

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They arrived back at camp with prey in their jaws. They each took a piece and Dawnflower padded over to Tigerstorm. "How did he do today?" He asked once she laid down beside him. "Great. He caught his first piece of prey today." She said with a proud smile. "That's good. Rainpaw learned a new scent today." Tigerstorm said with a laugh. "Oh no, which one?" Dawnflower asked, worried it might be a predator. "Skunk." He said as he burst into a fit of laughter. "Did she get sprayed?" Dawnflower asked with a laugh. "No, we just smelt it on our way to catch prey." He said with a smile. "Oh, well that's good." Dawnflower said. After a moment, she broke the silence. "Blackpaw asked me about his father today." She said softly as she looked at her apprentice.

Tigerstorm stopped eating and looked at her with concern. "I was fine. I just told him about him. I also told him about you and how you literally saved me. From the fox." She said as she looked at him. He was frowning and then sighed. "But I told him that was a story for when he was older." She noted and he let out a breath and he nodded and continued to eat. Once they were done, Dawnflower retreated to the warriors den and she fell asleep quickly.

Chapter 12

A moon has passed and Dawnflower woke to warm weather and a hungry feeling in the pit of her stomach. She got to her paws and stretched with a yawn and then quickly padded to the fresh kill pile. She grabbed a mouse and a rabbit for herself and she dug in hungrily. "Um, Dawnflower? With all do respect, maybe you should lay off the prey a bit..." Blackpaw said and she stopped eating and looked up at him. "What?" She asked through a mouthful of food. "Your stomach. You look like you're putting on some pounds, no offense." He said with a laugh and she almost choked on her food.

"My-my stomach?!" She exclaimed and he jumped back and nodded. Her face formed many emotions. Fear, happiness, anxiety, joy, embarrassment of her stomach and not noticing it, everything all wrapped in one. She got to her paws and bounded to the medicine cat den. "Flamepelt!" She exclaimed and Flamepelt emerged from sleep, her pelt unkempt and messy due to sleep. She looked groggy and seemed to wobble. "BlackpawmentionedmystomachandIthinkImightbepregnant!" She blurted out and Flamepelt told her to slow down, now awake at Dawnflower's excitement and terror. "My stomach." Is all she could say and Flamepelt had a wide smile on her face.

Flamepelt looked around her sister and did circles, frowning and seemingly deep in thought. "Have you noticed any changes with your daily life? Such as eating more, having to catch your breath more often with the simplest of tasks, pain in your stomach region, morning sickness, a pounding in your stomach?" She asked. "Now taht you mention it, all of that." Dawnflower said with a scared look on her face. "Well, your stomach is also getting huge so good news. You, my friend, are surely pregnant." Flamepelt said with an excited smile.

"I've been looking everywhere for you! You worried me half to death!" Tigerstorm exclaimed as he padded in. "Are you ok?" He asked frantically, trying to look her over for anything unusual. "I

think you're missing a big detail, Tigerstorm." Flamepelt said and he looked at her, confused as a mouse. "Her stomach." She said with a laugh. "Oh, I see. It's bigger but I didn't even notice. I only notice her endless beauty." He said with a smile and licked her ear. Dawnflower purred and Flamepelt interrupted.

"Look closer." She said and he did. He flicked his eyes between Flamepelt, Dawnflower, and her newly bulging belly. He did that a couple times and then he gasped and a wide smile appeared. "You're pregnant!" He exclaimed excitedly and Dawnflower nodded with a smile. "When is she do?" He asked and Flamepelt shurgged. "Let's find out, shall we? Lay down." She said and Dawnflower obeyed and laid down on a moss bed. Flamepelt pressed her paw gently to Dawnflower's belly.

"Well, when I found you two that was about a moon ago so another moon should do it." She said with a smile. Dawnflower and Tigerstorm looked at each other lovingly. "So come back if your pains increase or if you feel you need to." Her sister said with a smile and Dawnflower nodded. "Thank you." Tigerstorm said as they left the medicine cat den. "I should probably tell Leafstar just so she knows ahead of time." She said and Tigerstorm nodded. He padded to the fresh kill pile and sat down, waiting for his mate.

Dawnflower padded in the den after asking for permission and she saw Leafstar sitting and grooming herself. "Hello Dawnflower, what brings you in here today?" She asked with a smile and Dawnflower smiled and sat down, her somewhat bulging belly protruding out. Dawnflower moved her paw and looked at her belly, a slight red tint in her ears. She then settled for standing and she smiled awkwardly. "Yeah, if you can't tell, I'm pregnant." She said with a laugh and Leafstar smiled. "When it gets to be too much, let me know and I'll make an announcement for another cat to train Blackpaw." She said with a smile and Dawnflower nodded.

"If it's not too much, I would like to have Brackenheart train him when I'm ready." Dawnflower said. "Of course." Leafstar said with a nod and Dawnflower padded out and back to Tigerstorm. She nodded and he smiled and nuzzled his mate. "I'm so happy." He said softly and Dawnflower nodded. "I can't wait until we can see our little kits." She said with a purr as she looked down at her belly.

Mistyheart padded out of the warriors den and to Dawnflower and Tigerstorm. "Hey. How are the kits doing?" She asked and Dawnflower gave her a confused look. She never told her about their kits, unless it was that obvious. "Blackpaw and Rainpaw." She clarified and she smiled. "They're doing good. Blackpaw caught his first piece of prey today. But it's too bad taht I won't be able to train him for much longer." She said with a smile.

Mistyheart looked at Dawnflower's belly and she smiled. "Aww. Does Blackpaw know?" "Not yet. But I'll tell him today." Dawnflower said and Misyheart nodded. "Well congratulations." The blue gray warrior said with a smile and the orange and white queen nodded with a smile. "We should go." Dawnflower said and Tigerstorm nodded. They found their apprentices eating under a shady tree. "I don't want you doing much. I'm worrying about you now. I don't want you going out there alone. It could be dangerous." Tigerstorm said softly and away from the apprentices. "I'll be fine." Dawnflower said with a reassuring smile.

Reluctantly, Tigerstorm nodded. She smiled and she called Blackpaw over. "Let's go." She said and padded out of camp with Blackpaw beside her. "So, are you ok?" He asked after they got away from camp. "Yeah, why?" "You ran to the medicine cat den looking scared but exciteda t the same time." He said and looked at her. "Oh, well it's just that I'm pregnant." She said with a shrug of her shoulders. He gasped and stopped walking. "What!? I thought you were going to wait until you were done training me?" He asked. "Well it kind of just happened." She said with a shrug.

"Oh. Well I'm a little disappointed but the fact that you and Tigerstorm are having kits and that I get to see them is better than disappointment." He said with an excited smile. "And why would you be disappointed? Would you miss your best friend?" She asked in a baby voice as she licked his pelt like a mother would. "No." He said and tried to scramble away but she tightened her grip on him. "Fine. Yes, I would miss you!" He said with annoyance. She laughed and let him go. "That's all you had to say." She said and he mocked her laugh playfully.

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When they returned to camp, they had prey in their mouths. They put it in the pile and she took a plump rabbit for herself. "Good job on that new move today." She said before he walked away. He smiled and nodded and padded to Jadepaw, who was alone. Dawnflower watched the scen unfold; Jadepaw getting fiesty with her brother. She growled and stalked over to her.

"What is going on?" She hissed to Jadepaw. "I asked if she wasnted to eat with Rainpaw and I and she got mad at me and said that she didn't need anyone and that she could take care of herself." Blackpaw said sadly. Dawnflower had never seen him so sad before. In fact, he was rarely sad and it pained her to see him this way. "Is this true, Jadepaw?" She snapped. She could tell that having kits was affecting her mood and making her angry and hostile. Jadepaw glared at Dawnflower and snubbed her away.

"Siblings need each other, Jadepaw. What if you're in trouble and you call out to them for help? They're not going to be there for you because you kicked them out of your life and then guess what?" She said menacingly and she leaned in to whisper something. "You'll be dead and it will be your own fault." She whispered, her tone laced with venom. Jadepaw didn't know how to feel. "Think about that." Dawnflower said as she moved away from Jadepaw's ear and stalked off to Tigerstorm.

"What happened?" He asked as she sat down beside him. "Jadepaw, that's what." She said angrily. "What about her." He clarified. "She thinks she doesn't need her siblings at all, even during battle." She said as she looked at him. He nodded and continued to eat. She then padded to teh warrios den and curled up to go to sleep.

Chapter 13

A moon has passed and Brackenheart had taken Blackpaw as his apprentice a quarter moon ago, when training Blackpaw herself had become too much of a struggle. She was now laying in the nursery and gazing down at her bulging belly with a loving smile on her face. She would be due any day now and she couldn't wait, partly because she could waddle around camp and partly because she was in growing ain with each passing day that her kits aren't born *and* because she wants to see her beloved kits.

It was sunset and Tigerstorm had returned from training Rainpaw. He had fresh kill in his jaws and she purred and lit up as he entered the nursery. She was the only one in there for now and she often became lonely when no one was around. He set the mosue by her paws and she ate quickly and hungrily. She was always hungry due to the kits. "I wonder how many there are." Tigerstorm said as he laid down in front of her so he was facing her. "I'm guessing three or four or even five with the way you're eating." He said with a laugh. "I think five." She said, remembering her dream that she had had many moons ago.

He nodded with a smile and ate his sparrow. Once Dawnflower was done, she yawned. "You should go to sleep." Tigerstorm advised and she nodded and rested her head on her paws. Tigerstorm walked behind her and laid down and rested his head on the crook of her neck. He slept with her at night so she wasn't lonely.

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A pained yowl ripped through the air. Dawnflower's eyes snapped open as another wave of pan flodded through her body. Tigerstorm jumped and screamed and then took one glance at Dawnflower and raced to the medicine cat den. Flamepelt bounded in, armed with borage leaves and sticks. Feathermist was getting old and she couldn't work as well as Flamepelt did. "Get these kits out!" Dawnflower exclaimed in pain and she yowled once more in pain. Mistyheart and Blackpaw came running in. Blackpaw stood on the

sidelines as Dawnflower did at his birth. Mistyheart laid down in front of the orange and white queen and tried her best to calm her down.

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After almost an hour of pain, the first kit had just been delivered. "Nip the sac, Tigerstorm." Flamepelt ordered and he did and a brown swirled tabby revealed itself. "Give him to Dawnflower." She said quickly and he nodded. He gave the kit to it's mother and she eagerly licked at the kit, getting him to breathe. But as she did so, another kit unexpectedly came out as well. Flamepelt gasped and nipped the sac and licked the kit furiously to get it to breathe. "This one is a male." Tigerstorm said and he went back to get the other kit, who turned out to be a female brown tabby with a white muzzle and two white front paws.

A few minutes of no signs of pain or anymore kits had passed and Dawnflower gazed down at her two kits. "They're beautiful." She said softly and everyone agreed. "What should we name them?" She asked as she looked up at Tigerstorm. "Well, I was kind of hoping to name one Bramblekit." He said. "Ok. Bramblekit for this one and I think Brookkit for the female would suit her." Dawnflower said and she rested her head. "Don't go to sleep, Dawnflower. Keep your head up. You still have more kits." Flamepelt warned and Dawnflower snapped her head up. As if on cue, another wave of pain greeted her.

Another brown tabby was born and it was brought to it's mother. "It's a male." Tigerstorm announced and Flamepelt nodded. "I think Hawkkit would be good for him." Dawnflower said once she caught her breath and Tigerstorm nodded. Another moment later and another kit was born. This one was an all brown female with one white paw, her front left one. "What about Otterkit? Since she's brown." Mistyheart suggested and Dawnflower nodded. "Otterkit it is." She said and licked her kit's head.

Not even ten minutes went by and another kit came wailing out. "Another female." Flamepelt called. This kit was like her mother; light orange patches and white fur. Once Dawnflower caught her breath, she announced the name. "Honeykit." She said with a smile.

They suckled and Dawnflower licked them lovingly.

"Queens normally don't go an hour without giving birth to another kit unless they're done. How's your pain, Dawnflower?" Flamepelt asked and she looked much better than she did when she first gave birth. "Subsiding." "Then I'd say you're good. Congratulations." She said and padded to the medicine cat den to put back her supplies and then returned a moment later. Flamepelt squeezed in between the cats and looked at her nieces and nephews. She eyed them longingly but smiled anyway. "As much as we all want to look at these tiny kits, we should let the mother rest. She needs it." Flamepelt said and the cats retreated to their dens after saying congratulatons to the happy couple. Tigerstorm, however, stayed put with his mate.

She yawned and Tigerstorm padded behind her and rested his chin on her neck and they fell fast asleep.

Chapter 14

"Brookkit opened her eyes today and she takes after you. She has green eyes. And Bramblekit too. I don't know about the others yet." Dawnflower said as she ate the fresh kill that Tigerstorm had brought her. He had just returned from training Rainpaw and she was sharing the good news to him. "That's great." He said with a smile. Although he seemed happy about it, his mind seemed elsewhere. "Are you ok?" She asked and he shrugged his shoulders. "Rainpaw smelt the scent of badger today. It was near fourtrees. Even though it's farther from camp, I still worry. What if there's an attack and I'm not there?"He said softly as he looked at the tiny kits that were sleeping or suckling.

"Hey, don't worry. I'm sure the badger will move along soon." She assured and he reluctantly nodded. He inched closer to the kits and saw that Brookkit did, in fact, have green eyes. She crawled over and pressed her nose to his for a split second before crawling back to her mother. Tigerstorm chuckled and looked at the other kits. "Otterkit has yellow eyes." He stated as his daughter opened them for a second before closing them quickly. Dawnflower purred and licked the top of her daughter's head. Bramblekit crawled past his mother's paws and she purred before picking him up by the scruff and placing him near his siblings. He meowled in protest and Tigerstorm chuckled.

"They're becoming a hassle already." Tigerstorm teased and Dawnflower nodded. "Did you hear that Nightclaw is pregnant too, now!?" Dawnflower exclaimed in disbelief. "She is!? Who would ever want to be mates with *her*!?" He exclaimed and Dawnflower shrugged. "I'd rather be alone than have her in here with me." She said with distaste and Tigerstorm nodded. "I don't pay attention to her so I wouldn't know. When is she going to be in here?" He asked and Dawnflower shrugged. "At least a moon. What if she does something to our kits? You know she's a psycho!" She exclaimed and she now feared for her kit's life between the badger and

Nightclaw.

"Well, let's not think about that right now." He said as he laid down in front of her, facing her and the kits for tonight.

****

Dawnflower woke to the sun shining in through the entrance of the nursery and her kits were sleeping yet. She slowly got to her paws, making sure not to wake them. Once she was in the clear, she stopped at the entrance and looked back at her kits. Otterkit yawned and strethced her paws but that was it. Dawnflower's tail flicked with uncertainty on whether to leave her kits to eat or not. She sighed and padded out of the nursery and to the fresh kill pile. She picked out a rabbit and she kept her eyes on the nursery at all times. She saw Nightclaw out of the corner of her eye and she ate quicker, eager to get back to her kits and to get out of her sight.

As if on cue, the kits started meowling and calling out to their mother. She raced to the nursery and saw that they were all up and crawling around. They were trying to stand but they fell back down. Dawnflower giggled and gathered them up and placed them near her belly to eat. Dawnflower smelt a familiar scent that sent chills up her spine. Nightclaw was padding to the nursery.

The black cat entered and smirked smugly at Dawnflower and the kits. "What do you want?" Dawnflower hissed at Nightclaw. "Oh, that's no way to treat a fellow queen." She said darkly and Dawnflower growled as she stepped nearer to the kits. "How precious." She said in false admiration. "Leave, now. You're not due for another moon." She said through gritted teeth. "Oh really? Well I just got sent here. I am now a full queen." Nightclaw said as she did circles around Dawnflower and she kept her eyes on the black cat at all times. "I'd rather be alone for these six moons than be here with you for even one day." The orange and white queen hissed.

Nightclaw chuckled and laid down on the other side of the nursery. "Whose the father, then?" Dawflower asked, and edge to her voice. "Wouldn't you like to know?" Nightclaw retorted. "That's why I asked." Dawnflower snapped and Nightclaw laughed. "A queen doesn't have to share who the father is." Nightclaw stated and

Dawnflower rolled her eyes. "But we all know who the father of *your* kits are." She said with a smirk and Dawnflower scoffed. "Obviously, he's my mate." She said with attitude. "Feisty." Nightclaw said and clamped her jaw shut for emphasis.

Dawnflower took a deep breath and rested her head on her paws and closed her eyes. She woke up in Starclan and she realized she must have fallen asleep. She feared for her kits but a cat appeared and assured her they were fine. Blackfoot. She purred as she nuzzled him and sat down. "I told you about Tigerstorm and you didn't listen to me." He said with a laugh and Dawnflower smiled. "And now look at you, all grown up and with a family already. Where has the time gone? And Blackpaw is doing great. He'll be a wonderful warrior." Blackfoot said in admiration and Dawnflower nodded. "I'm glad I got to be a part of his life." Dawnflower said and Blackfoot smiled. "I see you two are best friends as you and I were." He said with a smile. "We still are." She said softly and nuzzled him once more.

He smiled and nodded. "But I didn't come here to reminisce over the past and current events." He said, turning serious. Dawnflower gave him a confused look and tipped her head slightly. "As much as your kits are adorable and perfect and as much I want to talk about them, I came here to warn you of something. Something potentially dangerous to the clan if it is not stopped." Dawnflower tensed and so many things ran through her head. "Darkness will reign but the dawn will rise once more."

Blackfoot faded with the wind but his warning, more of a prophecy, still rang clear. The scene cleared and Dawnflower blinked open her eyes and looked around. She remembered Nightclaw and she looked down to find all the kits there. She let out a breath of relief and rested her head on her paws once more. *The darkness will reign but the dawn will rise once more*. What could it mean? She needed to talk to Tigerstorm. She remembered that her sister was a medicine cats and that they get prophecies. She quickly got to her paws and left the nursery. Nightclaw wasn't in there so she assumed she was good for now.

She padded into the medicine cat den and called for her sister. She appeared after taking care of Silvermist. Thee former medicine cat

wasn't doing so well. She would've retired to the elders den by now but she's not feeling well. "Are you ok?" Flamepelt asked and Dawnflower noticed she didn't seem distracted by a prophecy and she debated on telling her or not. After quickly arguing with herself, she decided that she's her sister, a medicine cat, and she deserved to know. "I need to talk to you in the nursery." She said finally and Flamepelt nodded and Dawnflower padded to the nursery quickly.

A few minutes later, her sister joined her. "I had to tell Silvermist where I was going." She explained quickly and Dawnflower nodded. "So what is it?" She asked as she laid down in front of her. She checked her surroundings and sniffed the air to make sure no one was near the nursery. "I received a prophecy." She said quietly. Flamepelt gasped and her eyes widened. "What is it?" She asked and Dawnflowe recited the words to her. "The darkness will reign but the dawn will rise once more." Flamepelt repeated to herself. "Who told you?" She asked and Dawnflower told her it was Blackfoot. "Intersting." Flamepelt said as she looked deep in thought.

"I don't know. We'll just have to see. Prophecies aren't going to give you an answer to everything, Dawnflower. They're prophecies for a reason." Flamepelt said with a laugh and Dawnflower nodded. "How are they doing?" Flamepelt asked, referring to the kits, and seemingly looking for a subject change. "Great. They opened their eyes yesterday. Well, Otterkit, Bramblekit and Brookkit did. The other two have yet to open their eyes." She said with a smile. The kits were crawling around and still trying to stand. They were getting stronger every day and they did better today than they did yesterday.

"I can't wait until they can walk and run and play." Dawnflower said with a purr and Flamepelt nodded. "Well, I should probably go." Flamepelt said and the orange and white queen nodded.

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Tigerstorm padded into the nursery and Dawnflower was staring at the wall, overthinking about the prophecy. Nightclaw still hadn't returned to the nursery and whenever she padded out to get fresh air, she never saw her. That was good for her though, because then she didn't have to worry about her kits. "Are you ok?" He asked as

he placed a rabbit by her paws. "I guess. I don't know. I received a prophecy today and I'm just thinking about it." She said softly and she pushed the rabbit away with distaste. Her stomach wasn't feeling well.

"What was it about?" He asked in astonishment and she explained what Blackfoot had said. "Woah." Tigerstorm breathed and she nodded in agreement. "I think you're that dawn." He said after a moment of silence. "What?" She asked in disbelief. "I think you're that dawn that Blackfoot was talking about." Tigerstorm said with a smile. She gave a look of disgust. "How can I be? I'm a queen." She said with a small smile and he smiled. "For now." He pointed out and she shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh well. We should probably just go to sleep though and sleep on it. Maybe you'll get more information." Tigerstorm suggested and Dawnflower nodded and he curled up beside her.

Chapter 15

A loud yowl pierced the night air and Dawnflower and her kits snapped awake. A moon had passed and Nightclaw must be having her kits now. Dawnflower tried ushering her kits back to the moss bed and back to sleep but it was no use; they were bored and excited for new playmates. There was no point anyway, they were up and they weren't going to go back to sleep as long as Nightclaw was screaming out in pain. "Get these kits out!" She exclaimed angrily as Flamepelt rushed in. She ignored her and gave her a stick. "Yeah, shut her up." Dawnflower muttered to herself with a laugh. It was actually quite humorous. She sat down and her tail flicked with agitation now that her kits were up and intrigued with Nightclaw's kits.

"Brookkit." Dawnflower snapped and the kit jumped and rushed back to her mother. She was sniffing at Nightclaw's foot and getting too close for Dawnflower's comfort. "Look, I'm the kit with a stick." Bramblekit said as he played with the sticks designated for Nightclaw. "Bramblekit." Dawnflower scolded and he dropped it with a sigh. Honeykit and Otterkit were play fighting and Honeykit bumped into Flamepelt. "Dawnflower." Flamepelt complained as she looked back at her sister. "Alright, that's it. You're all going back to sleep." Dawnflower exclaimed and the kits whined. "Then sit by me and don't move." She said and the kits sighed and sat beside her.

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"Dawnflower, I need your help." Flamepelt called and Dawnflower gave a look of disgust. "What, why!?" She exclaimed. "Because you're the only other not busy cat here, now help me for the love of StarClan!" Flamepelt snapped and looked back at her sister and Dawnflower sighed and padded to her. "Press down on her stomach near her leg. She's having complications." She explained and she placed her paw on her stomach and waited for further orders, since she started speaking again. "Nightclaw, I need you to push as hard

as you can on the count of three. And when she pushes, Dawnflower, press down but not too hard." She said and Dawnflower nodded. "1, 2, 3." Flamepelt said and an agonizing wail escaped Nightclaw's mouth and Dawnflower pushed.

Out came one kit and then another, both in sacs. Dawnflower never planned a one on one view of a birth and especially not Nightclaw's. "Nip the sac." Flamepelt ordered and Dawnflower groaned. "Do it or it will die!" She snapped and Dawnflower nipped the sac. A brown tabby with lighter brown stripes meowled loudly Flamepelt told her to put it by Nightclaw's stomach. Dawnflower did and when she looked back, Brookkkit was slowly padding to Nightclaw. "Brookkit, what did I say?" Dawnflower hissed and she retreated to the moss bed with the rest of her siblings.

"Here, take this one." Flamepelt said and Dawnflower was unsatisfied to see that it was a black kit with two front white paws, white chest fur, and a white muzzle. She took it by the scruff and placed it by Nightclaw, who was licking her first kit. She then licked the second kit.

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Nightclaw ended up giving birth to four kits; two male, two female. Flamepelt had just left the nursery and Dawnflower's kits jumped around. "Can I go see the new kits?" Brookkit asked excitedly, her green eyes bright and filled with adventure. "Absolutely not. You will not bother with those kits at all." Dawnflower said, crushing Brookkit's wishes. "Oh come on, Dawnflower. Loosen up." Nightclaw said smugly and Dawnflower growled. "I would never do that to *my* kits no matter how much I hate a cat." Nightclaw said with a smirk. The mere thought of Nightclaw being a better mother than her angered the orange and white queen. She sighed and gave in to her kits. "Fine, but only a peek."

The kits squealed with excitement and they bounded to the black cat and stood in front of her four suckling kits. Dawnflower joined her kits and she saw two brown tabby kits, one with light brown stripes and one with black stripes. There was that black kit and then there was a black and brown tortoiseshell. "What are their names?" Otterkit asked and Nightclaw answered.

"Well, his name is Thornkit." She said, referring to the first born kit. "Her name is Darkkit." She said, and indicated to the second kit, the black one. "Her name is Tawnykit and the last little one, his name is Mudkit." Nightclaw said, referring to the black and brown tortie and the the brown tabby male. Brookit smiled as she looked at Thornkit. "They're so cute. I can't wait to play with them!" Otterkit exclaimed and Nightclaw smiled. Dawnflower knew it was forced and it angered her.

Dawnflower smelt pine and she purred as she padded to the entrance of the nursery and saw him pad in. They nuzzled each other and purred. "Dad!" The kits exclaimed as they bounded to him and jumped up at him. He chuckled and laid on his stomach and tucked his paws under his chest as the kits played with his fluffy neck fur. "So how did it go?" She asked softly and he shrugged. He was at a gathering that night and it hadn't gone so well. "Berrystar is accusing us of stealing prey from her territory. They threatened us with battle." Tigerstorm said softly, so as not to let the kits hear. She could see the unease and worriment grow in his eyes. "I know you're worried, Tigerstorm, but you don't have to be. I'll keep our kits safe no matter what, I promise." She said quietly and he nodded with a reassured smile.

Dawnflower padded to the entrance and looked back to her mate and flicked her tail for him to follow. Once they were out of earshot of both the kits and Nightclaw, she spoke freely. "ShadowClan? We all know Nightclaw is half ShadowClan, even if she doesn't admit it. Do you think she'll be faithful to her home clan? She might even leave with them after killing some of us." Dawnflower said with a dry, humorless laugh. Tigerstorm sighed. "That's what Leafstar said. And you know she's losing her lives quick and her old age isn't helping or it is what's killing her. Either way, she's dying, Dawnflower. And this battle might be the end. Then Whitestorm will be leader." He said, his eyes filled with sorrow. Dawnflower looked back at the nursery and feared, once more, for her kit's lives.

"We've had a long night and I don't want to be bothered by these fears any longer." Dawnflower said and Tigerstorm nodded and followed her to the nursery. "I see Nightclaw had her kits." Tigerstorm said with distaste after he stopped Dawnflower. She

nodded with an eye roll. "And I had to help. And the kits are taking a big interest in them, especially Brookkit." Dawnflower informed and Tigerstorm shook his head and padded into the nursery. "Ok, time to go to sleep little ones." Tigerstorm said as he rounded them up and laid down beside them. Dawnflower laid on the other side and she fell asleep quickly.

The dream with her, Tigerstorm and their kits playing replayed in her mind but now all of it was in perfect view. But it soon turned into a nightmare when it tore with cat scratches and images of a battle enfolded and it cut to a white cat overtop a black one with blood dripping from it's jaws. It then cut to that same white cat on top of the Highrock. It was blurry but she could tell it was most likely Whitestorm or Snowfur.

Chapter 16

Two moons have passed since Nightclaw had her kits and Dawnflower padded into the nursery after eating a rabbit. It was Greenleaf now, so prey is plentiful. Tigerstorm was watching the kits as she ate and they took turns watching their kits. When she walked in, Tigerstorm met her half way and nuzzled her before walking out and leaving for the rest of the day to train Rainpaw. Both Rainpaw and Blackpaw are doing great in their training and they would be warriors in the next two or three moons.

Dawnflower saw Brookkit and Thornkit playing together. Dawnflower has noticed that they have been getting rather close to each other in this last moon and that concerned the orange and white queen. Otterkit and Hawkkit were wrestling together and Honeykit was playing with Bramblekit and Tawnykit. Nightclaw was nowhere to be seen. She sneaks out at night sometimes and just leaves her kits. "Where's momma? I'm hungry." Darkkit complained to her brother, Mudkit. Tawnykit heard them and she agreed as well. Thornkit wasn't paying attention, he was too busy playing with Brookkit.

Dawnflower sighed at hearing the kit's hunger complaints. How could a mother leave her its like that? "I have enough milk to go around, you can have some of mine." Dawnflower said with reluctance. Even though she didn't like Nightclaw, no kit should go hungry. "Really?" Darkkit asked in surprise. Dawnflower nodded and laid down on her side. "Thank you." She said with a purr and Dawnflower nodded. Her own kits joined in except Brookkit, who was playing with Thornkit. "I'm only doing this once, Thornkit. You better get some now because I'm not doing it later." Dawnflower said with an attitude to the young kit and they both bounded over and suckled.

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Nightclaw padded into the den and she looked frantic when she didn't see her kits right away. She then looked at Dawnflower and

saw that all the kits, even Nightclaw's, were asleep by her belly. Nightclaw glared at Dawnflower and the orange and white queen got up slowly and quietly, so as not to disturb them. "What do you think you're doing?" Nightclaw hissed. "Being a better mother then you'll ever be." Dawnflower hissed back. Nightclaw growled and went to attack Dawnflower but she dodged it and batted her hard with unsheathed claws. Dawnflower hissed and growled and knocked Nightclaw off her feet. Nightclaw was smaller than Dawnflower, muscle wise, and Dawnflower was stronger and better built than the black cat, and Nightclaw knew it.

Dawnflower pinned her down and bit down on her neck hard as a warning. "Don't *ever* do that again, or I'll kill you." Dawnflower said softly and menacingly into Nightclaw's ears. "I'd like to see you try." The black cat said with a dry laugh and Dawnflower growled and released the menace. She turned and saw all nine kits huddled up, scared, shaking, and wailing. "Come on kits." Dawnflower said and lead her kits out of the nursery. They reluctantly followed, out of fear, but did so anyway. She lead them to a shady tree and had them sit down in front of her. "Me and Nightclaw were just... playing." She lied with a smile, so as not to scare her kits. "That didn't look like playing." Otterkit said, her voice wavering with fear. Dawnflower went to speak but was interrupted by Bramblekit.

"I thought it was cool!" He exclaimed and the four other kits nodded in agreement. "Well I for one, don't like all that fighting." Otterkit said and Hawkkit looked at her with confusion. "But you were playing with me earlier." He said and Otterkit shook her head. "That was only play fighting. That looked like real fighting." She said and he shrugged. Dawnflower would like them to try fresh kill but they're still too young. The kits quickly forgot about what had happened in the nursery, for they were soon rolling around in play fight.

A few minutes later, Blackpaw padded up and laid down beside Dawnflower. "Hey, you're back early." She said with a smile and he nodded. "Yeah, Brackenfur said that I deserved the rest of the day off because of how amazing I was doing." The black and white apprentice said proudly. Dawnflower smiled proud and purred in response. The kits came rushing over and Blackpaw laughed and

played with the kits as well. He would make a good father as well, Dawnflower observed with a smile. Nightclaw's kits bounded over, or tried to without stumbling and falling, and played with Dawnflower's kits.

The orange and white queen looked over and saw Nightclaw pad out of the nursery. The black cat stopped and the two queens locked eyes, glaring at each other with Nightclaw lashing her tail angrily. She then padded out of camp once more and Dawnflower rolled her eyes. Otterkit shortly padded to her mother and laid down in the crook of her chest and front leg. Dawnflower looked down and purred as she licked her kit. Within minutes, the tiny kit was fast asleep and purring.

Dawnflower noticed that Otterkit has become a sort of 'outcast' with the rest of the kits. That didn't cast her out, she just didn't have interest to play with them recently. She also noticed that they had specific best friends within the kits. Brookkit and Thornkit were practically inseparable and Bramblekit and Tawnykit were getting closer and Honeykit and Mudkit were best friends already and Hawkkit and Darkkit were getting closer every day. Of course they all played with each other and were all friends but they all went back to their groups, Dawnflower noticed.

Blackpaw had padded away awhile ago to talk to his mother, Mistyheart. Tigerstorm had returned awhile later and they head butted each other gently as a form of greeting. The kits ran over to him and played with him. He was back earlier than normal and Dawnflower didn't mind that. Otterkit, hearing the commotion, had woken up and was joining her siblings in a chorus of joy and playfulness. "Nightclaw left again." Dawnflower informed only soft enough so Tigerstorm could hear.

He gave a wide eyed look and Dawnflower nodded. "I'm practically raising nine kits instead five." She hissed in annoyance as the kits played, not paying attention to what the adults were talking about. "She's a horrible mother. She's out all the time, being disloyal to her clan. She's probably meeting a loner or being a kittypet and a clan cat at the same time; you can't do that. And she's leaving her kits to fend for themselves if it weren't for you. If you weren't there, her kits would have already been dead." Tigerstorm said as he gave a

sympathetic look to the four kits.

As much as Dawnflower hated Nightclaw, she still felt sympathy for her kits. They shouldn't have an absent mother. The kits started getting tired and Dawnflower giggled. "Ok kits, come on. Back to the nursery it is." She said as she got to her paws and the kits followed and they padded in one by one, with the two adults following lastly. She laid down and let all the kits suckle one last time before going to sleep. It was her secret; suckle and sleep. Within minutes, they were done and asleep, sound on one moss bed. Tigerstorm padded behind her and laid down and rested his chin on her neck. All of them fell asleep quickly and soundly.

Chapter 17

Three moons have passed and Dawnflower's kits are now five moons old. Nightclaw continues to leave her kits, but now days at a time. She practically raised the poor kits and she doesn't know what will happen when she leaves the nursery. She noticed many changed about them as well; Otterkit has been spending more time in the medicine cat den with Flamepelt and her four other kits have been spending more time with Nightclaw's kits. Blackpaw should be a warrior any day as well, so Dawnflower is happy about that. And in a moon, her own kits will be apprentices.

Dawnflower was currently eating a mouse. Prey is starting to become scarce once more as the cold weather picks up. Leafstar called to the queen and Dawnflower noticed how frail her leader has really become in these last moons. When she was an apprentice, her leader seemed strong but now, she's just gotten old and weak as the moons go by. Dawnflower followed her leader in her den and sat down in front of her. "I've noticed that you've been caring for Nightclaw's kits. I noticed this in the beginning and I'd hoped it would get better but I only see now that it's gotten worse. I should've done something earlier." Her dappled leader said and Dawnflower nodded.

"You won't have to stay in the nursery for another moon, I'll have another she cat look after them. You've done enough, Dawnflower. You are a strong she cat who will do great things one day." Leafstar said and the orange and white queen noticed something in her leader's eyes that she couldn't place. Dawnflower nodded in thanks and smiled. "If I may be honest, and I wouldn't tell anyone else this, Dawnflower. I only trust you. I don't even trust Whitestorm and he's my own deputy." Leafstar exclaimed.

Dawnflower flet pride surge through her veins at her leader's words

and a smile spread across her lips. "But I doubt Nightclaw's loyalty to this clan." Leafstar admitted and her gaze turned serious. Dawnflower nodded in agreement. "As do I, Leafstar. She leaves days on end and if it weren't for me, her kits wouldn't have made it past their first moon!" She exclaimed in disbelief and Leafstar nodded. "I know. It's a shame." She said with a frown. "But I have manners to discuss with you, Dawnflower." She said and Dawnflower nodded for her to go on.

"I would like you to train Darkkit. I fear she may turn into her mother and I would like a strong, loyal cat like you to bring her on the right path." Leafstar said. It felt rude to discriminate against Darkkit only because of her pelt. The other three are just as likely to turn out like their mother but Dawnflower accepted anway. Leafstar smiled and nodded. "I also have a request." Dawnflower stated and Leafstar willed her on.

"Otterkit seems interested in being a medicine cat, as I observe, and if she wants to be a medicine cat, I was hoping she could train under the guidance of Flamepelt." Dawnflower hoped. She knew the rule about kin but she just had to try. Leafstar let out a breath and thought for a moment. "Well, kin aren't supposed to train kin but who else will do it? Shadowclan's threat is still hanging in the air and if, StarClan forbid, Flamepelt happens to be attacked, she won't have an apprentice to take over. The other kits don't seem interested and who knows when another she cat will have kits? This once, I will let Flamepelt train her kin." Leafstar said with a smile and Dawnflower smiled wide.

"Thank you." She said with a purr and Leafstar nodded with a smile. "And also, I would like if Blackpaw could train one of my kits." She said and Leafstar nodded and Dawnflower smiled once more. She said thank you and then padded out of the den and into the medicine cat den. Flamepelt was explaining what juniper berries were to Otterkit and she could see a spark in her daughter's eyes that wasn't there before with her siblings and fighting. She smiled and purred. "Oh, hey Dawnflower." Flamepelt said after hearing her sister purr.

She smiled and padded in more. "I need to speak with you." She said and Flamepelt nodded and padded out of the den with her

sister. "I just spoke with Leafstar and she said that Otterkit could train under the guidance of you, if both of you would like." She said and a wide smile spread across Flamepelt's face. She nodded eagerly and Dawnflower giggled a bit and padded back into the den. "Otterkit, come here." She said and Otterkit obeyed.

"I see you like working in the medicine cat den." She started and Otterkit scraped dirt with her paw and nodded slowly, seemingly ashamed. "What's wrong?" Dawnflower asked and Otterkit looked up at her. "You aren't mad?" She asked and Dawnflower gave her a look of disbelief. "Oh honey no, why would I ever be mad at you for doing something you love?" She asked softly and Otterkit shrugged. "Everyone else is going to be big strong warriors and I'm going to be a medicine cat." She said and Dawnflower shook her head.

"Otterkit, I don't care what you do, whether it be a medicine cat, warrior, permanant queen, loner, I don't care. I love you for you and that's all that matters." Dawnflower said softly and lovingly as she nuzzled and licked her kit. Otterkit laughed softly and purred. "And Leafstar said you can train under Flamepelt's knowledge." She said with a smile and Otterkit smiled wide and jumped around excitedly. Dawnflower giggled and headbutted her kit gently. She padded back to the den and excitedly exclaimed what Leafstar had said to Flamepelt. Dawnflower chuckled and padded back to the nursery.

It seemed crowded in here with her four big kits in the nursery. "Go play outside or something." Dawnflower said and her kits groaned and rested their heads back down. She saw that Brookkit and Thornkit were grooming each other and Bramblekit and Tawnykit were giggling and whispering in each other's ears. Hawkkit and Honeykit were wrestling and Darkkit and Mudkit were spectating and cheering on both Hawkkit, from Darkkit, and Honeykit, from Mudkit. Honeykit was currently winning until she triumphantly won the playfight and Honeykit and Mudkit nuzzled each other while Darkkit licked Hawkkit's ear.

Dawnflower realized what was happening between the kits and a sinking feeling settled in the pit of her stomach at the sight. She quickly padded out and a couple tail lengths out of camp. She took deep breaths and the black cat herself appeared in front of her. She

bumped into Nightclaw and the black cat hissed and stepped back. Dawnflower growled and then went back to hyperventilating. Aside her better nature, Nightclaw reluctantly asked what was wrong. "Our-our kits are falling in love." She announced and Nightclaw's green eyes went dull and then bright with anger.

"Show me." She growled and they padded to the nursery together and Nightclaw peeked in. She turned to Dawnflower, eyes dull and filled with annoyance. "Great! My kits just have to fall in love with the she cat's that I hate!" She snapped, her eyes filled with anger again. Dawnflower scoffed and rolled her eyes. "My thoughts exactly." She said and started pacing. Nightclaw growled and stormed into the nursery.

"Ok, that's it!" She yowled and, withshock and disbelief written on her face, Dawnflower padded in after her to see her yelling and seperating the kits. "Of all cats, her's!" She yowled and with unsheahed claws, slashed at her kits, drawing blood. Dawnflower growled and jumped on Nightclaw's back. The two wrestled like before and they ended up outside of the nursery. Dawnflower slashed at Nightclaw's underbelly, feeling the blood drip down her claws, and bit her neck hard. Nightclaw yowled in pain and a cat knocked Dawnflower off of the black cat before she could do any real damage.

Dawnflower realized it was Whitestorm and, once on her paws, growled at the deputy, her neck fur bristling with anger. The white cat ignored her and grabbed Nightclaw roughly by the scruff and dragged her to the Highrock, where Leafstar was standing with a look of horror. Dawnflower saw Flamepelt and Otterkit rush to the nursery and bring all the kits to the medicine cat den. She focused her attention back to Leafsar, who yowled for everyone's attention.

"What happened, Dawnflower?" Leafstar asked and Dawnflower stood and padded forward. "I noticed that both of our kits had been getting rather close with each other in these last moons. She suspected love between them and she snapped and attacked her kits." She said, meeting the gaze of every cat. "Is this true?" Leafstar asked, and there was an edge to her voice that was dark and filled with disbelief. Nightclaw only growled and Whitestorm and Brackenfur clung to her on both sides, causing Nightclaw to hiss at

the toms. "I take that as a yes. Nightclaw, you have dishonored your clan. You made a promise to protect this clan with your life but you've only destroyed it. You've lost everything, Nightclaw." Leafstar spat with a menacing tone to her voice that laced with venom.

"And now you, Nightclaw, are exiled from ThunderClan. Your wounds will not be treated and you will be sent on your way as is. If we scent you on ThunerClan territory or even see you, we will treat you as another cat who has stumbled onto our territory and we will not hesitate to attack you. Now leave ThunderClan, Nightclaw, and never return." She said, authority and a sense of demand in her voice. "I'm not leaving without my kits." She growled and Leafstar scoffed. "You are not taking those kits with you. They don't deserve you as a mother. If they leave with you, they won't even last a day." Leafstar hissed and Nightclaw growled. "You'll pay for this, ThunderClan!" She yowled as she bounded out with a limp.

Leafstar beckoned for Dawnflower and she padded with her leader to the den. The orange and white queen sat down, curling her tail around her paws. "Before you assume anything, you're not in trouble. I understand why you did what you did and I'm glad you did. She really is an evil cat and she deserved what she got." She said and Dawnflower nodded in agreement. "You've grown to be a loyal ThunderClan cat; a cat that every clan wished they had." Leafstar said and Dawnflower smiled proudly. "Thank you." She said and Leafstar nodded. "Now go check on the kits and explain everything from the beginning." Leafstar said and Dawnflower nodded and quickly padded to the medicine cat den.

Otterkit was comforting the kits and her own were huddled in a corner, shaking and traumatized. Nightclaw's kits were also huddled together and Flamepelt were tending to their wounds, putting poultices on their scratches and cleaning up the blood. They were deep cuts and Dawnflower thought they would probably leave scars. "Are any of you hurt?" She asked her kits as she looked them over, but they shook their heads. She frantically licked her kits and then padded to the others and Flamepelt. She licked Nightclaw's kits comfortingly and they asked why she did that. Dawnflower sighed and sat down. "Kits, come here." She called to her own and

they huddled up with Nightclaw's.

"Well, Nightclaw was never a good mother. She always left you and even for days on end. I ended up taking care of you four for most of the time, as well as my own kits. And when we got in that fight the first time, it was because she saw that I had nursed her kits when she was gone and she got mad and so I told her who was boss. And she continued to leave for days on end and then today, she saw that some specific kits were falling in love and she just couldn't have that. She hates me and she didn't want her kits to fall in love with mine." Dawnflower explained and the kits had wide, scared eyes. "And now she's exiled. You'll never have to worry about her again, alright? You're safe here." She said as she nuzzled the kits.

The kits nodded and yawned and Flamepelt suggested that the four of them stay there until tomorrow to see how they do. Dawnflower took her kits to the nursery and had them go to sleep. They've had a long day and they needed sleep. She laid down and watched her kit's breaths even out into sleep. Tigerstorm returned later than normal and she explained to him what had happened. "Wow. She's finally gone. I can't believe they fell in love with each other." He said quietly in disbelief and Dawnflower nodded. She then laid down and before she could comprehend what was happening, she fell asleep.

Threats linger in the air but she knows that as long as she's by the kit's sides, nothing bad will ever happen to them, and she promised herself that. Dawnflower's sorrow had trapped her but she was now free of her chains that were restricting her. She has a mate, kits, a family, and she is free; what more could she want?